

JULY 2002  
VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1

ISSN 1681-4363

# **Social Evolution & History**

**Studies in the Evolution  
of Human Societies**



Moscow  
'Uchitel' Publishing House



# **SOCIAL EVOLUTION & HISTORY**

**Studies in the Evolution  
of Human Societies**

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# **SOCIAL EVOLUTION & HISTORY**

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of Human Societies**

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Volume 1, Number 1 / July 2002

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**Social Evolution and History**, the journal's aim is to contribute to the integration of such fields of knowledge as anthropology, history, sociology, and the philosophy and theory of history. The journal is devoted to the study of many aspects of the evolutionary changes that have occurred over the long course of human history.

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The Journal is published in English twice a year.

*Editors*

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## On the Distinction between Evolution and History

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**Tim Ingold**

*University of Aberdeen*

### ABSTRACT

It is a fact about human beings, Maurice Godelier has insisted, that alone among animals, they 'produce society in order to live'. By this he means that the designs and purposes of human action upon the environment – action that yields a return in the form of the where-withal for subsistence – have their source in the domain of social relations, a domain of mental realities that stands over and above the sheer materiality of nature. Through their transforming action upon the natural environment, Godelier claims, human beings transform not only their relations with nature but also those relations among themselves constitutive of the form of society. In so doing, they **make their own history**. Though other animal and plant species might be said to be products of history too, it is not one that they have produced for themselves, but rather the outcome of an evolutionary process of variation under natural selection.

This paper takes a critical look at the notion of making history. It is shown that this notion rests on a dualistic conception of the human being, as an intentional subject on the one hand, and a material object on the other. Rejecting this dualism, it is proposed that the image of making as a metaphor for production be replaced with that of **growth**. In growing plants or raising animals, the farmer or herdsman does not so much transform nature as play a part in establishing the conditions of development for selected non-human components of the environment. Likewise, through their intentional actions people play their part in establishing the conditions under which successive

human generations grow to maturity and live out their lives. We call that process history. As such, however, it is but one aspect of a process that is going on throughout the organic world. The conventional distinction between history and evolution is thus dissolved. For human beings do not so much transform the material world as play their part, alongside other creatures, in the world's transformation of itself.

## TRANSFORMATION AND AUTOPOIESIS

Maurice Godelier introduces his book *The mental and the material* with a fact and a hypothesis (1986: 1). The fact is that, alone among animals, human beings 'produce society in order to live'. By this he means that the designs and purposes of human action upon the environment – action that yields a return in the form of the wherewithal for subsistence – have their source in the domain of social relations, a domain of mental realities that stands over and above the sheer materiality of nature. Through their creative action upon the natural environment, Godelier claims, human beings bring about changes not only in their relations with that environment but also in those relations among themselves that are constitutive of society. And this leads to the hypothesis, namely that it is precisely because they transform nature that human beings have a History. Of course it is possible to argue that other animal and plant species also have histories of a kind, but these are not histories that they have produced for themselves, but are rather the outcomes of an evolutionary process of variation under natural selection. Human beings, by contrast, are not only made by history, they also play their part in helping to make it. Theirs, if you will, is History with a capital 'H' (Godelier 1989: 63).

My purpose in this article is to take a critical look at this notion of making history. While I would agree with Godelier that in a certain sense, human beings do produce society in order to live, I believe that we should cease thinking of production as a process of making, and regard it rather as a process of growth. I want to argue, in short, that History is not so much a movement in which human beings **make** society, as one in which they **grow** one another. This argument, however, forms part of a broader project. For many years now, I have been acutely troubled by the distinction between the (small *h*) natural history of the human species and the (capital *H*) History of humanity. It has been customary to refer to the former kind of history by means



of the concept of evolution, and to reserve the concept of history for the latter. For convenience, I shall adhere to this convention. The problem, then, is to figure out the nature of the difference between history and evolution. It seems to me that on the solution to this problem hinges our entire understanding of the relation between the social and the biological dimensions of human existence.

There is a well-established argument that proceeds along the following lines. The human species evolved, like any other, through a process of variation under natural selection. This led to the establishment of certain dispositions and capacities which are universal to every individual of the species, regardless of the specific ways in which they may be expressed. With these capacities in place, history – as it were – ‘took off’. The entirety of human history is thus to be understood as the realization, over time, of potentials established in the course of our evolutionary ancestry, and that each of us carries as part of an innate, genotypic endowment. Entailed in this argument, however, is the notion that at some point, unprecedented in the evolution of life on this planet, humanity broke through the barrier of nature, whereupon history began, along with all the other things that are supposed to make us ‘truly human’ – language, symbolism, art and architecture, technology, religion, and so on. And this idea of a breakthrough has set prehistorians on a frantic and much publicized search for the point of origin of what they nowadays call ‘modern humans’: people, they say, who were just like us **anatomically**, though not of course **culturally** (Ingold 1995). This point is said to mark nothing less than the ‘human revolution’ (Mellars and Stringer 1989).

My own view is that to seek the origin of true humanity is to set off in quest of an illusion, and in the course of this article I hope to show why. First of all, however, we need to consider why this illusion should exert such a hold over the modern scientific imagination. The explanation, I believe, lies in the character of science itself. The project of science, and its claim to deliver an authoritative account of how nature really works, is founded in a belief in the supremacy of human reason. Yet contemporary scientists, like their eighteenth century predecessors, are also committed to a notion of the psychic unity of mankind. Thus while not all humans are scientists, it is supposed that all humans have evolved with the **capacity** to be scientists – that is, with a rational intelligence. The process of evolution in which this capacity came to be established, a process of encephaliza-

tion involving an extraordinary increase in the relative size and complexity of the brain, has therefore to be distinguished from the process of history, in which the evolved capacity was progressively realized. For the alternative, which held sway from the publication of Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) through to the early decades of this century, was to suppose that scientists and philosophers actually have more evolved brains than other people, past and present, and therefore – as T. H. Huxley famously declared (1874: 107–111) – that the distance separating the scientist from the savage is similar in kind and degree to that between the savage and the ape.

In short: we have one theory, of evolution, to explain how our apelike ancestors became human, and another, of history, to explain how (some) humans became scientists; and at the intersection of the two, the point of origin where the axis of history rises from the axis of evolution, lies the figure of the 'anatomically modern human'. And we are left with the paradox that the claim of biological science – namely, that humans differ from their hominid or pongid ancestors in degree rather than kind – presupposes a human history that differs in kind, not degree, from the process of evolution. That is why we do not hear of anatomically modern elephants, or anatomically modern chimpanzees. Only with human beings is it found necessary to distinguish cultural from anatomical modernity, and the respective processes leading up to them. Every human is a potential scientist, but there are no scientists among the animals (Ingold 1995: 208).

Now behind this paradox lies what is perhaps the founding contradiction of Western thought and science: that it has no way of comprehending human beings' creative involvement in the material world save by taking them out of it. Insofar as we are **within** the world we are objectively bound to the determinations of an evolved human nature which we have had no hand in shaping; conversely we are able to shape our own destinies only insofar as they issue from a historical consciousness that is constituted **without** the world, in the intersubjective domain of society. My principal aim is to establish a sense of history that enables us to resolve this contradiction. The idea of history that has come down to us from Marx, and that is powerfully reiterated in the writings of Godelier, is rooted in the notion of **transformation**: thus through their transformations of external nature in the process of domestication it is supposed that human beings have transformed their own inner nature, and in so doing, have built them-

selves a history of civilization. I want to suggest instead that we think of history as a process in which human beings do not so much transform the world as play their part in the world's transformation of itself. History, in a word, is a movement of **autopoiesis**.

To think of history in this way is at once to dissolve the dichotomy between society and nature, and to recognize that the processes wherein human generations shape the conditions of life for their successors are continuous with those that are unfolding throughout the organic world. No longer, then, are we forced to make a radical distinction between the axes of evolution and history; and by the same token the imaginary point of origin formed by their intersection disappears. To reach this position, I shall present my argument in four stages. First, I shall explore the meanings of the two key terms, production and history, as these are constituted within the discourse of what, for simplicity, I call the 'orthodox view'. Secondly, I show how the idea of production entailed in the notion of making history has its antecedents in a much older view, which regards human work as a matter of revealing or bringing forth what is already immanent in the natural world. I shall then go on to show how my dawning awareness of the inadequacies of the orthodox view was coupled with the realization that the establishment of a more satisfactory alternative would require nothing less than a complete overhaul of the biological theory of the organism. Finally, returning to a pre-modern concept of production as growth, and to a conception of history as 'growing people', I shall consider the possible implications of this alternative approach. I begin, then, with the orthodox concept of production.

## THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY

Like all other animals, human beings have to eat in order to live. It is widely supposed, however, that in the provisioning of humans, the means of subsistence do not pass directly from hand to mouth but take a detour through society. As Marx and Engels declared over a century ago, it is in actually producing their food, rather than simply gathering or collecting it ready-made in nature, that humans distinguish themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom (Marx and Engels 1977: 42). The notion of production, here, has a double connotation – of appropriation and transformation (see, for example, Cook 1973: 31). To appropriate is to take hold of some portion of living

nature in such a way as to make it the object of relations among persons; to transform it is to alter it from its naturally given state in accordance with a design or plan that issues from a superior source in society. Non-human animals may literally take hold of their quarry, whether with tooth or claw, but they do not thereby convert it into property; they may also, through their activities, wreak transformative effects on the environment, but they do not do so intentionally. They have no conception of their task. Human beings alone are said to produce, since they confront nature as a domain of raw materiality external to their socially constituted selves. In short, couched within the duality of society and nature, production figures as the work of social agency against a natural resistance.

In this confrontation, moreover, lies the dynamic of history, as conceived within the terms of the orthodox view. Thus it is commonly supposed that whereas the events of evolution 'just happen', those of history are intentionally authored by human beings themselves. 'The essence of the distinction between human history and natural history', wrote Marx, with acknowledgement to Giambattista Vico, 'is that the former is the work of man and the latter is not' (Marx 1930: 392, n.2). In his *New Science* of 1725, Vico had berated philosophers for having wasted so much effort in studying the world of nature which, having been made by God, ultimately lies beyond human comprehension, at the expense of the study of things which owe their origination to the human mind and which philosophers, being human too, could hope to understand. History, then, comprises a series of changes over time in the subjective conditions of human authorship – in the structures of perception and cognition, in patterns of awareness and response, in the understanding of self and others – which have left the organism, as an objectively given, biological entity, virtually untouched.

In the course of this history, humans have spread to every habitable region of the earth, great empires have risen and fallen, and developments in science and technology have placed in the hands of at least some humans instruments of control and weapons of destruction of unparalleled magnitude. Through all of this, however, basic human nature is assumed to have remained much as it was in the Stone Age, the product of an evolutionary adaptation to the conditions of life faced by ancestral hunter-gatherers in Pleistocene environments hundreds of thousands of years ago, in the days before history even began. Two prominent psychologists have recently gone so far as to

define history as 'a sequence of changes through which a species passes while remaining biologically stable' (Premack and Premack 1994: 350). The very possibility of history, in this sense, presupposes a dimension of existence beyond the purely biological – a dimension commonly identified with humanity itself.

It is somewhat paradoxical that human nature should be considered to be so fixed and immune from the effects of history, when these effects upon the nature that surrounds us, in the **environment**, are apparent for all to see. The paradox is resolved, up to a point, by attributing the formal specifications of human nature to an interior program, nowadays known as the genotype. According to the rule first enunciated by Weismann, at the close of the nineteenth century, there can be no reverse influence of the developing organism on its hereditary endowment, thus rendering impossible the so-called 'Lamarckian' inheritance of acquired characteristics. Weismann's barrier, which is fundamental to the structure of modern evolutionary theory, effectively insulates the genotype from the direct impact of historical experience (Ingold 1990: 212–213).

However when we turn to consider the human transformation of external nature, as in the conversion of virgin forest into cultivated fields, or of naturally occurring raw materials into tools and artifacts, the relation between form and substance is inverted. Far from providing the form, in the shape of a genetic program, nature furnishes the substance, upon which are imposed forms – cultural or ideational rather than genetic – whose source lies in the exterior domain of human society. The artificial environment, as it were, wears its forms on its material surface rather than hidden within, and consequently bears the cumulative imprint of a changeful sequence of historical subjectivities. Surveying the world around us, we see nature not in its pristine state, but modified to varying degrees through the inscription of cultural design. That is why we are inclined to speak of buildings, tools and other artifacts as objects of 'material culture' rather than of nature, even though the stuff of which they are made is intrinsically identical to that which may be found in environments untainted by human activity.

## THE HISTORY OF 'PRODUCTION'

Let me now return to Godelier. Taking as his starting point the idea of production as a human transformation of nature, he sets out to

classify the various manners and degrees of modification of the environment by means of a division into five 'kinds of materiality'. The first comprises that part of nature which is wholly untouched by human activity; secondly there is the part that has been changed on account of the presence of humans, but indirectly and unintentionally; the third is the part that has been intentionally transformed by human beings and that depends upon their attention and energy for its reproduction; the fourth part comprises materials that have been fashioned into instruments such as tools and weapons, and the fifth may be identified with what we would conventionally call the 'built environment' – houses, shelters, monuments, and the like (Godelier 1986: 4–5). In this classification the critical division falls between the second and third kinds, for it is also taken to mark the distinction between the wild and the domestic. The third part of nature is said to consist, primarily, of domesticated plants and animals, whereas the biotic components of the first and second parts are either wild or, at most, in a condition of pre-domestication. Moreover, Godelier points to the domestication of plants and animals as a paradigmatic instance of the transforming action of humanity upon nature, or in a word, of production. This leaves us, however, with two unresolved problems.

The first concerns the status of hunters and gatherers who have sought not to transform their environments but rather to conserve them in a form that remains, as far as possible, unscarred by human activity. If, as Godelier asserts, 'human beings have a history because they transform nature' (1986: 1), are we to conclude that humans who do not transform nature lack history? For his own part, Godelier resists this conclusion: 'I cannot see any theoretical reason to consider the forms of life and thought characteristic of hunters, gatherers and fishers as more natural than those of the agriculturalists and stockbreeders who succeeded them' (1986: 12). The activities of hunter-gatherers, like those of all human beings at all times, and unlike those of all non-human animals, are prompted by mental representations that have their source in the intersubjective domain of society. Yet apart from the construction of tools and shelters (corresponding to the fourth and fifth kinds of materiality), these representations are not inscribed in the substrate of nature. Hunter-gatherers have a history, but theirs is a history that is written neither in the pages of documents nor upon the surface of the land. Overturning the classical conception of hunter-gatherers as arch-representatives of

humanity in the state of nature, Godelier reaches the rather paradoxical conclusion that it is in their societies that the boundary between culture and nature, the mental and the material, is most clear-cut. The more that the material world is subordinated to the ends of art, the more that it is 'humanized', the more the nature/culture boundary is dissolved (1986: 4).

The second problem is one to which Godelier alludes in a footnote, but fails to take further. It is that for most non-Western people, 'the idea of a transformation of nature by human beings has no meaning' (1986: 2, fn. 1). Thus the peoples of the past who were initially responsible for domesticating plants and animals almost certainly had quite different ideas about what they were doing. This is not the place for speculation about what those ideas might have been. The point I want to stress at this juncture is merely that the idea of production as consisting in the human transformation of nature, like the ideas of nature itself and of society as an entity counterposed to nature, has a history of its own during a particular period in a particular part of the world. By tracing this history back to its roots we may find that these ideas have grown out of a set of understandings very different from those familiar to us today, yet much closer to the apparently exotic cosmologies of non-Western 'others'.

It is beyond the scope of this article to document the history of Western thinking about humanity and nature (Glacken's [1967] massive treatise on the subject remains unsurpassed). Suffice it to say that the essence of the kind of thought we call 'Western' is that it is founded in a claim to the supremacy of human reason. Entailed in this claim is a notion of making things as an imprinting of prior conceptual design upon a raw material substrate. Human reason is supposed to provide the form, nature the substance in which it is realized. This idea was the fulcrum of Marx's theory of value, according to which it was the work of shaping up the material from its raw to its final state that bestowed value on what was already 'given' in nature. It made no difference, in principle, whether that work was represented by the labor of the artisan, in the manufacture of equipment, or by that of the farmer or stockbreeder, in the husbandry of plants and animals. Both were conceived as instances of productive making – the human transformation of nature.

Yet in arriving at his theory of value, Marx turned on its head an older idea, most fully developed in the writings of the French Physio-

crats, Quesnay and Turgot, in the eighteenth century. For these writers too, the role of the artisan was to imprint a rational design upon material supplied by nature. But in doing so, he created no new value. To the contrary, his work was understood to involve nothing more than a rearrangement of what nature had already brought into existence. The real source of wealth, according to Physiocracy, was the land, and lay in its inherent fertility. And for this reason, the activities of those who worked the land, in growing crops and raising animals, were understood to be fundamentally different in character from the activities of those whose tasks lay in the field of manufacture.

In an elegant analysis, Gudeman (1986: 80–84) has shown how the economic doctrines of Physiocracy were closely modeled on the theory of perception and cognition proposed some seventy years previously by John Locke. In Locke's economy of knowledge, the natural world is a source of raw sensations impinging upon the receptor organs of the passive human observer. The mind then operates on these received sensory data, separating and combining them to form complex ideas. In just the same way, according to the Physiocrats, the land furnishes its inhabitants with basic raw materials, to which human reason adds form and meaning. As Gudeman puts it, 'in this "intellectual" economics, agriculture is to artisanship as sensation was to mental operation' (1986: 83). The role of the farmer is to receive the substantive yield of the land, that of the artisan is to deliver the formal designs of humanity. Where the farmer's work is productive, in that it results in an influx of wealth to the human community, it is nevertheless passive since the creative agency in bringing forth this wealth was attributed to the land itself and, behind that, to divine intervention. Conversely the artisan's work is non-productive, since it adds nothing to human wealth, but is nevertheless active since it is impelled by human reason (Gudeman 1986: 87).

In this view, although it would still be fair to describe the act of making things as a human transformation of nature, such making is not the equivalent but the very **opposite** of production, just as artisanship is the opposite of agriculture. Production is a process of growing, not making. The farmer, and for that matter the raiser of livestock, submits to a productive dynamic that is immanent in the natural world itself, rather than converting nature into an instrument to his own purpose. Far from 'impressing the stamp of their will upon the earth', to adopt Engels's imperialistic phrase (1934: 179), those who



toil on the land – in clearing fields, turning the soil, sowing, weeding, reaping, pasturing their flocks and herds, or feeding animals in their stalls – are assisting in the reproduction of nature, and derivatively of their own kind.

In classical Greece, too, agriculture and artisanship were clearly opposed, belonging – as Vernant remarks (1983: 253) – ‘to two different fields of experience which are to a large extent mutually exclusive’. The contrast between growing things and making things was delightfully phrased by the Sophist author Antiphon, writing in the fifth century BC, who invites us to imagine an old wooden bed, buried in the ground, taking root and sprouting green shoots. What comes up, however, is not a new bed, but fresh wood! Beds are made, but wood grows (Vernant 1983: 260). As a grower of crops rather than a maker of artifacts, the farmer was not seen to act upon nature, let alone to transform it to human ends. Work on the land was more a matter of falling into line with an overarching order, at once natural and divinely ordained, within which the finalities of human existence were themselves encompassed. Even were it technically possible to transform nature, the very idea would have been regarded as an impiety (Vernant 1983: 254).

If there is a certain parallel here with the doctrines of Physiocracy, despite the immense lapse of time, it is doubtless because both classical Greek and eighteenth century Physiocratic authors were able to draw on a fund of practical experience in working on the land. When it came to farming, they knew what they were talking about. But with regard to artisanship, their respective notions could not have been more different. For according to classical Greek writers, the forms which the artisan realized in his material issued not from the human mind, as constructs of a rational intelligence, but were themselves inscribed in the order of nature. Thus the idea of making as an imposition of rational design upon raw material would have been entirely alien to Greek thought. ‘The artisan is not in command of nature; he submits to the requirements of the form. His function and his excellence is ... to obey’ (Vernant 1983: 294). This, of course, is the precise inverse of Godelier’s assertion that in the husbandry of plants and animals, in making tools and constructing buildings – that is, in the production of the third, fourth and fifth kinds of materiality – it is nature that submits to the requirements of human form. The idea that production consists in action **upon** nature, issuing from a superior source in society, is an essentially modern one.

## THE ORGANISM AND THE PERSON

With that, we can return to the distinction between evolution and history. Insofar as this, too, rests on the dualism of reason and nature, it is also a product of the structure of modern thought. By the same token that reason is supposed to have broken through the barriers of nature, so it is assumed that there is more to being human than can be comprehended within an exhaustive biological account of the nature and functioning of the organism. Indeed it is precisely by this 'excess' that we are inclined to define the scope of our common humanity. Whereas an animal such as an elephant or a chimpanzee is all organism, the human being is held to be an organism **plus** (Collins 1985): its organic nature is supposedly 'topped up' with some additional factor – call it mind or self-awareness – that can be found not by external observation but only by the knowledge we have of ourselves as **persons** with specific identities, feelings, memories and intentions. And if history is about the changing forms of human subjectivity, as distinct from evolutionary changes in the objective, species-specific form of the organism, then it follows that the person exceeds the organism by precisely the same measure that history exceeds evolution.

The notion that the life of persons is conducted in an intersubjective world over and above that of the life of organisms – that it is an essentially **social** life – is as central to anthropology as it is to modern thought in general, underwriting as it does the conventional division between social and biological branches of the discipline. For a long time my own thinking followed the same lines. I felt sure that the models and theories developed by evolutionary biologists to account for the properties of organisms and their relations with their environments must apply as well to the human as to any other species, yet it was also clear that these models left no space for what seemed to be the most outstanding characteristic of human activity – that it is intentionally motivated. Human intentions, I argued, are constituted in the social domain of relations among persons, as distinct from the domain of ecological relations in which human beings, as individual organisms, related to other components of the natural environment. The problem, then, was to understand the reciprocal interplay between these two domains, social and ecological (Ingold 1986: 9).

As time went on, however, I became increasingly dissatisfied with

this approach, with its inherent dualisms, its disembedding of social relations from the overall matrix of human relations with the environment, and its implicit appeal to an essentialist notion of human uniqueness. It eventually dawned on me, in something close to a moment of revelation, that organisms **are** persons: 'the human being, then, is not two things but one, not an individual **and** a person, but, quite simply, an organism' (Ingold 1990: 220). One cannot, I concluded, distinguish the process by which human beings take on the attributes of personhood in the course of social life from the process of ontogenetic development of the human organism in its environment. This conclusion, once reached, seemed so obvious that I wondered why it had evaded me for so long. On reflection, I think it was because I had taken the structure of modern evolutionary theory more or less 'on trust'. To defend my view of the organism-person, I now realize, will require nothing less than a radical revision of contemporary biological thought. In this article I can do no more than sketch an outline of the form this revision might take.

If the elephant or the chimpanzee is 'all organism', so too is the human being. We are all too easily misled, however, by a tendency to regard the animal, by comparison with the human, as a 'mere' organism. Indeed modern biological science encourages us in this belief, for the image of the organism it has bequeathed to us is a peculiarly impoverished one. It depicts organic life as a passive rather than an active process, in which the organism reacts according to a genetically pre-specified program to the given conditions of its environment. With this view, personal powers – of awareness, agency and intentionality – can form no part of the organism **as such**, but must necessarily be 'added on' as capacities not of body but of mind, capacities that modern thought, as we have seen, has traditionally reserved for human beings. Even today, now that the possibility of non-human animal awareness has arisen as a legitimate topic of scientific speculation, the basic dualism of mind and body is retained – for the question is phrased as one about the existence of animal **minds** (Griffin 1984). Consciousness, then, is understood as the life of the mind, as distinct from that of the organism to which it belongs.

In my view, to the contrary, there is nothing in the least 'mere' about being an organism. For organic life, as I conceive of it, is active rather than passive, open-ended rather than pre-programmed, the creative unfolding of a total field of relations within which beings

emerge and take on the particular forms they do, each in relation to the other. Life, in this view, is not the revelation of pre-specified forms but the very process wherein forms are generated (Ingold 1990: 215). It follows, however, that there can be no specification of the form of an organism that is independent of the developmental context within which it comes into being. Now the possibility of such a context-independent specification is an essential condition for Darwinian theory, since it is this specification – the genotype – that is said to undergo evolution through changes in the frequency of its information-bearing elements, the genes. Moreover it is in terms of the genotypic specification that organisms are assigned to species. Thus according to orthodox theory, species evolve as genotypes change.

If on the other hand, as I maintain (with Oyama 1985), organic form is an emergent property of developmental systems, then the evolution of form lies not in changing gene frequencies but in the unfolding of a total relational field. And in this process, organisms can play their part as producers as well as products of their own evolution, contributing through their actions to the environmental conditions both for their own development and for that of other organisms to which they relate. Every being, as it is caught up in the process and carries it forward, arises as an undivided centre of awareness and agency: an enfoldment, at some particular nexus within it, of the generative potential that is life itself. We do not, then, have to think of mind or consciousness as something added on to the life of organisms, in order to account for their creative involvement in the world. Rather, what we may call mind is the cutting edge of the life process itself, the ever-moving front of what Whitehead (1929: 314) called a 'creative advance into novelty'.

## MAKING SOCIETY AND GROWING PEOPLE

Taking this view as my starting point, I should now like to return to the key concepts, of production and history, in order to see where this alternative approach might lead us.

When Engels declared that 'the most that the animal can achieve is to **collect**; man **produces**' (1934: 308), he wrote from the perspective of one whose experience lay in manufacturing industry, and for whom the notion of production would have referred in the first place to the act of 'making things' – in other words to the construction of

artificial objects through a process of transforming natural raw materials. Had his background been in agriculture rather than industry he might have recognized the peculiarity of applying such a notion to the production of food. For as every farmer knows, agricultural produce is not made, it is grown. To understand production as a process of growth is to go back to a much older sense of the term, though one that is still in common use. To produce, in this latter sense, is to 'bring forth'. Farmers, thus, assist in bringing forth the yield of the land. The work that they do, in such activities as field clearance, fencing, planting, weeding and so on, or in tending their livestock, does not literally make plants and animals, but rather establishes the environmental conditions for their growth and development.

Different regimes of plant and animal husbandry can, I think, best be distinguished in terms of the ways in which human beings involve themselves in establishing these conditions for growth. To grasp this idea, all that is required is a simple change of perspective: instead of thinking about plants or animals as part of the natural environment for human beings, we have to think of humans and their activities as part of the environment for plants and animals. But behind this switch there lies a point of much more fundamental significance. If human beings on the one hand, and plants and animals on the other, can be regarded alternately as components of each others' environments, then we can no longer think of the former as inhabiting a social world of their own, over and above the world of nature in which the lives of all other living things are contained. Rather, both humans and the animals and plants on which they depend for a livelihood must be regarded as fellow participants in the same world. And the forms that all these creatures take are neither given in advance nor imposed from above, but emerge within the relational contexts of this mutual involvement. In short, human beings do not, in their productive activity, transform the world; instead they play their part, alongside beings of other kinds, in the world's transformation of itself. It is to this process of self-transformation that I refer by the concept of growth.

What becomes, then, of the notion of history? Let us suppose that the work of human beings, throughout history, has consisted in growing rather than making. Now it is clear that humans play their part in establishing the conditions of growth not only for plants and animals, but for fellow human beings as well. Indeed we could reasonably define human history as the process wherein the people of

each generation, through their life-activities, furnish the developmental contexts within which their successors grow to maturity. Defined in this way, however, human history turns out to be but one part of an evolutionary process which, as I have argued above, is going on throughout the organic world (Ingold 1995: 203). The conventional distinction between history and evolution is thus dissolved.

The consequences of this dissolution are startling. For it puts paid to the idea that throughout the course of history, conceived as a **social** process, human beings have remained **biologically** the same, universally equipped with a set of structures and dispositions established through a process of evolutionary adaptation in the Pleistocene era. We have to recognize that human differences are indeed biological, in the sense that the particular skills, capacities and dispositions that people have brought to bear in their lives, in different times and places, are developmentally embodied – in specific aspects of neurology, musculature, even anatomy – through the experience of growing up in particular environments.

There is, then, no essential form of humanity, no way of saying what a human being is, apart from the manifold ways in which human beings **become** (Ingold 1991: 359). I should stress that this is not an argument for the priority of nurture over nature. Most biologists vehemently insist that the nature/nurture opposition is obsolete, yet it obstinately refuses to go away precisely because it is reproduced in the founding assumptions of their theory (Oyama 1985: 26). This theory, as we have seen, depends upon the notion that the development of any organism – human or non-human – is underwritten by a pre-existing (i.e. genotypic) specification of form. In denying the reality of the human genotype I do not mean to suggest that human beings are shaped instead by the given conditions of their environment. My point is that the metaphor of shaping, with its implication that form already exists, whether in the genes or in the environment, as a template, program or design prior to its realization in the material, is inappropriate to describe the process of growth by which the characteristics and capacities of persons are constituted in the course of their lives.

This is no less true with regard to the processes of formation of the environment. I have shown how, in the conventional account, the environment stands as substance to the historical forms of culture, which in turn stand as content to the ahistorical form of human na-

ture. In this account, every environment is sequentially shaped and reshaped through the imprint of one scheme of mental representations after another, each reshaping covering over or obliterating the one before. The material surface of nature is thus supposed to present itself as a palimpsest for the inscription of cultural form. My argument suggests, to the contrary, that the forms of environmental objects, like the forms of organisms themselves, are not superimposed upon a natural substrate but rather emerge in and through a process of growth. Or to put it in another way, they are crystallizations of activity within a relational field. To grasp this point, one need only think of all the activity that goes on, for example, in building a house. There may have been a building plan, but as a concrete presence in the environment, the house arises from the work of its builders, not from the plan. Nor is the building ever complete, for as long as the house is **there** it will inevitably be caught up in relations with its surroundings, both human and non-human. (It is worth recalling that every human house contains a great many more non-human inhabitants than we normally see or care to know about, and that their impact upon its developing form can be far from negligible.)

More generally, environments are continually coming into being through the activities of the creatures, human and non-human, whose environments they are (Ingold 1992: 50). This is a point, however, that tends to be obscured by a pervasive opposition, heavily institutionalized in Western society, between **design** and **implementation**. By attributing form to prior design we privilege the intellectual process of reason over the process of our bodily engagement with the environment, thus denying the creativity of that very process wherein forms actually come into existence. It is the same in Darwinian biology, where every organism is seen as the incarnation of a prefigured solution to a particular design problem – though the solution is attributed, in this case, to natural selection rather than rational choice. Yet what is natural selection, if not the image of human reason reflected back to the observing scientist, as he or she gazes into the mirror of nature?

## CONCLUSION

Let me return, finally, to Godelier's five kinds of materiality, distinguished – it will be recalled – according to the manner and ex-

tent of human involvement in their existence. In what way does Godelier's formulation differ from our own? The answer is that for Godelier, the formative role of humans lies in their capacity as beings who, to various degrees, act **upon**, intervene **in**, or do things **to**, a domain of nature that is external to their socially constituted selves. According to the argument I have presented, by contrast, human beings do not transform the material world. Rather, as beings whose very existence depends upon their situation **within** the world, their activities are part and parcel of the world's self-transformation, its autopoiesis. In this view, nature is not a surface of materiality upon which human history is inscribed; rather history is the process wherein both people and their environments are continually coming into being, each in relation to the other. This is one way of interpreting Marx's celebrated yet enigmatic remark that 'history itself is a **real** part of **natural history** – of nature developing into man' (Marx 1964: 143, original emphases). By the same token, it is also man developing into nature. Or in other words, to conclude, human actions in the environment are better seen as incorporative than inscriptive, in the sense that they are built or enfolded into the forms of the landscape and its living inhabitants by way of their own processes of growth.

### NOTE

This paper was first presented at the International Colloquium in honour of Maurice Godelier, held at the International Culture Centre, Cerisy-la-Salle, France, in June 1996, and is published (in French) in the proceedings of the colloquium (Descola, P., Hamel, J., and Lemonnier, P. (ads.), *La Production du Social: Autour de Maurice Godelier* (pp. 131–146). Paris: Fayard, 1999. The paper draws substantially on material I have published elsewhere, notably in Ingold (1996a, 1996b, 2000).



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# Uncovering the Laws of Global History

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## ABSTRACT

Global history is the outcome of a complex but knowable dynamic process that has been operating in the human sphere for the past two million years and that will continue to operate for as long as human society exists. Underpinning this dynamic process are the laws of history. This article argues that it is possible both to model the dynamics of human history and to identify the laws that govern it. Deriving the laws is the easiest part; it is modeling the dynamic process that is difficult. Without any real underlying laws there would be no global history and no human future. By employing the inductive method to identify the laws of history we could initiate a revolution in the social sciences to rival that in the natural sciences.

## INTRODUCTION

The reality that we seek to reconstruct in global history is the outcome of a complex but knowable dynamic process that has been operating in the human sphere for the past two million years and that will continue to operate for as long as human society exists. Underpinning this dynamic process are the laws of history. As I show in my global-history trilogy – *The Dynamic Society* (1996),

*The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997), and *The Laws of History* (1998a) – it is possible both to model the dynamics of human history and to identify the laws that govern it. Deriving the laws is the easiest part; it is modeling the dynamic process that is difficult. An important point to realize is that without any real underlying laws there would be no global history and no human future. Hence, if history has laws, and we are unable to recognize them, then we need to redo our history until we can.

In this article I briefly examine the following questions. Why have the social sciences fallen behind the natural sciences? What are laws and how can we know them? If laws exist how can we recognize them? How is it possible to derive the laws of history? How can we test the validity of these laws? And, what is the role of the laws of history? As this article reviews a global-history trilogy that amounts to 1,400 published pages, the detail, mainly historical, has been cut to the bone. The reader, before assuming that an issue has not been adequately dealt with (and no doubt they exist), should consult the larger work.

## **WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE RELATIVE BACKWARDNESS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?**

Since the sixteenth century, Western scholars have accepted the existence of scientific laws of nature. Modern science over the past few centuries has been preoccupied with the discovery and practical application of these laws. This has revolutionized both the natural sciences and human civilization. While the human sciences have also progressed, their achievements have been less remarkable. They have been unable to account for the forces underlying the changing fortunes of human society despite the heroic attempts of some of our greatest intellects – such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, H.T. Buckle, and J.S. Mill, to name a few – over the past three millennia. The modern response is to accept this heroic failure as evidence that there are no laws governing human society. Postmodernists are even prepared to make the unimaginative and defeatist claim that there is no objective reality.

But, we need to ask, what is the reason for expecting the human sciences to differ from the natural sciences? If we are unable to envisage a physical world operating in the absence of the laws of

nature, how is it possible to imagine social systems operating without the laws of history? The counterfactual world to the one in which viable dynamic systems operate according to identifiable laws is one in which everything is the outcome of a great cosmic lottery. In such a world, complex social systems could not even get started, let alone reach high levels of sophistication. I argue that, just as there could be no universe without physical laws, so there could be no civilization without historical laws.

A number of natural scientists have come to the same conclusion. Ernest Nagel (1961: 575), for example, concludes a survey of the problems in the logic of historical enquiry as follows:

In short, there appears to be no foundation for the contention that historical enquiry into the human past differs radically from the generalising natural or social sciences, in respect to either the logical patterns of its explanations or the logical structures of its concepts.

Nagel is puzzled. If there are no radical methodological differences between history and the natural and social sciences, why are there no established laws of history? Although this philosopher of science does not say so explicitly, he appears to believe, like many other natural scientists, that historical studies attract scholars who are less able than those attracted by the 'hard' sciences. Nagel (*ibid.*: 606), who notes the failed attempts by law seekers in history, rejects the usual excuses from historians that laws of history necessarily involve inevitability and he concludes his book by conjecturing that:

However acute our awareness may be of the rich variety of human experience, and however great our concerns over the dangers of using the fruits of science to obstruct the development of human individuality, it is not likely that our best interests would be served by stopping objective inquiry into the various conditions determining the existence of human traits and actions, and thus shutting the door to the progressive liberation from illusion that comes from knowledge achieved by such inquiry.

Are the philosophers of science right in implying that historians are less able than natural scientists? If scientists could be persuaded to stoop to historical studies, would they be able to show us the laws of history? The answer to both questions is, of course, an emphatic: no! Yet the problem remains. If the laws of history do exist as these natural scientists claim, why haven't they been uncovered? My work in global history suggests that there are two

main reasons for the failure to discover the laws of history. The first of these, discussed at length in my *The Laws of History* (1998a), is what I call 'existential schizophrenia'. By this I mean the great difficulty we experience in openly facing our true natures. The second, which was not realized until I was writing *The Global Crisis Makers* (2000), is tied up with the material incentives for ideas in science and in history.

The actions we need to take in order to survive and prosper are often so repugnant to the intellectual image we have of ourselves that we are unable to face them openly, certainly not on a daily basis. The truth could, and sometimes does, lead to self-destruction, which frustrates the central human objective of survival and prosperity. Accordingly, over millions of years we have learnt to deceive ourselves with such facility that we are usually unaware that we are doing so. We compartmentalize our lives and build barriers between what we do and what we think we should do. Just compare man's inhumanity to man throughout the world today with our conviction that we are altruistic beings! Existential schizophrenia is a normal rather than a pathological condition, because it is required in the universal struggle by mankind to survive and prosper. Yet, while it is a psychological condition essential for the continued survival of our species, it prevents us from understanding the nature of ourselves and our societies. Human society is no more complex than the physical world around us. Only our reactions to it and to ourselves are complex. It is, therefore, easier to be objective about the natural world and its laws than about our human world and its laws.

The second reason for the relative backwardness of history is that, over the past 500 years, the material incentives for ideas in science and in history have been very different. In *The Laws of History* (1998a), I argue that the scientific revolution during the two centuries following 1500 was a response not to changing social attitudes and institutions as most historians argue, but to the 'strategic demand' of Western Europe for new ideas in shipping, land transport, communications, finance, distribution, and war. This was driven by the new dynamic strategy of commerce, which followed more than 150 years of economic difficulties owing to recurrent plague. This new learning was further enhanced when the dynamic strategy of technological change (ushered in by the Industrial Revolution) progressively replaced the exhausted commerce strategy from the late eighteenth century. The dynamic

strategies of both commerce and technological change provided the material incentives for the scientific revolution.

Yet, at the same time, there was little strategic demand for the scientific development of the social sciences and, particularly, of history. History was valued, not for the insights it provided into the dynamics of human society, but for the entertaining stories it told. As I show in *The Global Crisis Makers* (2000), it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that governments began to make demands on the social sciences, particularly economics, and not until the past few decades that governments substituted neoliberal advice for strategic leadership as they lost sight of their real role. My point, expressed for the first time here, is that the recent loss of strategic vision by Western governments, which is itself an outcome of the unfolding technological paradigm, will require a better understanding of human society. In turn, this will require a revolution in the social sciences, including history, on the scale achieved in the natural sciences over the past five centuries. For the first time in human history, therefore, the social sciences will matter in the same way that the natural sciences have mattered since the sixteenth century. It is an intellectual revolution that will be based on induction – the ‘historical method’ advocated by Auguste Comte (1830–1842) and J. S. Mill (1843) in the early to mid-nineteenth century – rather than deduction that led in the twentieth century, particularly the second half, to the disaster called economic neoliberalism.

## WHAT ARE LAWS AND HOW HAVE WE COME TO KNOW THEM?

We need to consider the nature of the laws that emerged from the scientific revolution and the methods employed to discover them. This has relevance to the role of history as a social science.

### What are laws?

We can begin with a generally accepted definition of a law (Achinstein 1971: 85):

a law attempts to express a regularity underlying other regularities; it attempts to do so with a certain amount of completeness by isolating various factors that are involved and by indicating how they are re-

lated; and ... it attempts to formulate the regularity in a precise manner, often quantitatively.

Laws, according to this viewpoint, express regularities in behavior rather than individual occurrences. But what is meant by 'regularities'? It is generally held that under certain conditions, certain behavior or properties always occur, or that these properties are exhibited by all objects of certain types. And, it is argued, these regularities are characterized by completeness, precision, and simplicity (Achinstein 1971: 13–14). These regularities underlying other regularities – that is, laws – which must be open to empirical refutation, should always be regarded as provisional.

Yet there must be more to laws than the expression of regularities occurring in the real world. What if the regularities expressed in a scientific statement are tied to a particular time and place, or if they are merely the result of accident? Can they still be regarded as laws? Clearly not. To resolve these problems, philosophers of science usually emphasize both the *generality* and the *necessity* of laws.

While it is widely accepted that *generality* is the essence of a law, philosophers disagree about how narrowly or broadly this 'essence' should be defined. As I am concerned that only the highest standards should be employed when framing the laws of history, I have adopted a stringent set of criteria about generality (Achinstein 1971: 25–35) as follows.

- Laws are syntactically general in that they either begin with a universal term such as 'All' or 'No' followed by a subject term, or could be expressed in this way.
- Laws also have general subjects – such as bodies, gases, or economic systems – rather than individual subjects – such as projectiles, hydrogen, or particular economic institutions. Hence, laws are capable of explaining more particular regularities.
- Laws are unrestricted universal statements in that they are not restricted to regularities occurring within a particular space or a particular time. Clearly, the scope of explanation and prediction is finite, but it should not be possible to infer this from a law, only from the empirical evidence.
- Laws are general in the sense that what they say about a subject should hold for every particular case.
- Laws, contrary to the claims of some, may mention specific



objects – such as Kepler's law about the nine planets orbiting the sun – but only if the propositions are as general as they can be at the time of formulation.

We need also to consider the *necessity* of laws, by drawing the essential distinction between a law-like sequence in the natural world and a purely accidental sequence. Did a particular event, we must ask, occur by accident, or was it the predictable outcome of a causal sequence? Yet we should not regard the attributions of necessity and accident as mutually exclusive, as an event may be neither accidental nor necessary. The necessity of laws can be outlined as follows (Achinstein 1971: 42–57):

- If a proposition offers a correct explanation, then it is non-accidental or non-coincidental. But there is a difference between a correct relationship and a necessary one. To be both non-accidental and necessary, a proposition must also satisfy the following criteria.

- It must be strongly and systematically supported both directly by empirical evidence and indirectly by other associated laws. Hence, even if there is some negative empirical evidence, the law can still be validly supported, at least for the time being.

- It should possess supporting counterfactual propositions. In other words, the relationship expressed by a law can be demonstrated by the probable outcome of assuming that one of its necessary conditions does not hold. For example, in the case of the laws of societal dynamics (Snooks 1998a: ch. 8), the supporting counterfactual for the 'Law of Dynamic Regression' (Appendix # 15) concerning the role of dynamic strategies in maintaining the viability of human society is the probable outcome in the late eighteenth century of suppressing the British Industrial Revolution.

- It must express 'analytical truth', in that it can be supported by reference to internal logic.

- It is capable of explanation. In other words, owing to empirical and analytical support, a given law can be said to be necessarily true, and owing to its ability to support certain types of counterfactuals it can be said to express a necessary relationship.

The philosophy of science, therefore, maintains that laws are concerned with regularities, in events, behavior, or processes in the natural and civilized world. And the laws concerning these regularities must be characterized by a generality that approaches the universal, a necessity that excludes the accidental, and a condition that can be supported both empirically and logically.

### How are laws knowable?

In the philosophy of science, this is a contentious issue. But, to the practicing social scientist, much of the confused debate appears to arise from the remoteness of some professional philosophers from the practice of scientific research. Three main views concerning the knowability of laws are surveyed briefly here: the inductivist, the deductivist, and the 'transfactual' realist.

The inductivist view, closely associated with empiricism, has the longest and most distinguished history. It is a method based on the assumption that experience rather than reason is the best, or even the only, source of knowledge about the external world. Our knowledge of the real world, in other words, ultimately depends on the use of the senses and what can be discovered through them. While empiricism can be traced directly back through the British empiricists – Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume – to Thomas Aquinas, and then to Epicurus, Aristotle, and Heraclites, there is good reason to believe that it stretches back to the beginning of human society (Snooks 1993: 95–106). There is, however, a sense of skepticism that pervades this tradition.

According to the deductivist view, a scientist attempts to resolve a problem by formulating – or, more often, by employing – a law. From this law, usually in conjunction with other assumptions, logical consequences are derived deductively. These consequences or proposition may then be tested empirically. The deductive stage will usually, but not always, involve mathematical methods, while the testing stage will often involve statistical techniques. Some deductivists in the tradition of Kant and Descartes – such as Karl Popper (1965), C.G. Hempel (1966), R. Feynman (1967), and their followers – deny that a law can be formulated by inferences from observations of the real world. Empirical evidence can only be employed, they assert, to test laws that are formulated from 'poetic intuition' or 'guesswork' rather than by systematic observation of reality. What they fail to understand is that the limited field of view that this approach affords – what I call 'the problem of deduction' – is more debilitating than the absence of mechanical rules of induction – what they call the problem of induction (Snooks 1998a: 21–24; 1998b: 68–70).

But there is a third, or realist view, of scientific method. Some philosophers of science, such as J.S. Mill (1843) and R. Bhaskar (1975), accept the possibility of non-deductive modes of reason-

ing. Essentially, they argue that there are two levels of reality: the patterns in everyday events, and the mechanisms that underlie these superficial patterns. The latter can be inferred from the former. This is very similar to the independent distinction I have drawn in my earlier empirical work (Snooks 1974, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999) between 'outcomes' and 'processes' – a distinction arising from historical observation rather than philosophical speculation. In my global-history trilogy, for example, *The Dynamic Society* (1996) is concerned with eternal dynamic mechanisms that underlie the ephemeral events and institutions analyzed in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997).

## A METHOD FOR DERIVING HISTORICAL LAWS

### The old historicist fallacy

Thinkers in ancient Greece were probably the first to ponder the difficulties of studying a world in flux and of deriving the laws of history. It is far easier to examine a world in equilibrium, particularly in the social sciences. But, unfortunately, the type of issues that can be examined using equilibrium analysis is severely limited and certainly excludes the important issue of societal dynamics. As I show in *The Laws of History* (1998a), there has been a two-fold response to this major problem. The 'metaphysical historicists' – including Plato, Hegel, Marx, Spencer, Spengler, and A. J. Toynbee – focused on ideal sociopolitical forms that constituted in their minds (rather than in the real world) either the beginning or the end of history. Dynamics in this framework is the supposed movement towards or from those ideal states, which they regarded as progress and regress respectively. But, as I have argued (Snooks 1998a: ch. 3), the 'laws' of destiny that they believed were governing such movement have no empirical validity. It is a matter of metaphysics.

The 'positive historicists' – including A. Comte, J. S. Mill, H. T. Buckle, the historical economists, and W. W. Rostow – attempted to overcome the problem of examining a world in flux by focusing upon historical outcomes. These outcomes are either the trends in key variables that are apparent over time, or are the historical stages through which, it is claimed, all societies must pass. In both cases the general conditions of economic progress are associated with these outcomes. Either the actual patterns in vari-

ables, such as population or national wealth, are regarded as historical laws and naively extrapolated into the future, or the conditions required to achieve certain hypothesized stages of progress are given a law-like authority and are extrapolated onto other countries that have yet to achieve a certain stage in the supposed progression. In both cases, predictions about the future are based precariously on superficial historical patterns that cannot be regarded as universally binding. They focus, therefore, on the ephemeral rather than the eternal aspects of social dynamics. This is the old historicist fallacy that has been rightly condemned.

### The new 'existential' method

How then is it possible to derive the laws of societal dynamics? Certainly not by philosophizing about the essence of things as the metaphysical historicists have done, or by attempting to generalize the historical pattern of events or institutions as the positive historicists still do. We will only derive the laws of history by exploring the dynamic historical mechanisms in the real economy that are responsible for the apparent regularities in human existence. This is the essence of what I call the new 'existential historicism'. As shown in *The Dynamic Society* (1996), there is a degree of constancy in the way human society changes, just as there is a degree of constancy in the way the physical world is transformed. Without this it would be impossible to plan for the future and, accordingly, human civilization would have failed to emerge.

What is the new existential method? Basically, it involves a four-fold system of analysis – the 'existential quaternary method' – which consists of the discovery of historical patterns (or 'timescapes'), the construction of a general dynamic model, the derivation of specific historical mechanisms, and the construction of a model of institutional change. In effect, this quaternary system embodies a set of 'inductive steps' (if not 'rules') that goes a long way to resolving the famous 'problem of induction'. These inductive steps emerged from work in a series of books I published between 1994 and 1998. We need to explore each of these four levels of analysis.

Timescapes provide 'pictures' of the dynamic outcomes of human society throughout time, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The quantitative pictures show the numerical relationship between important economic variables such as real GDP, popula-

tion, and prices. While these pictures are the beginning of understanding, they must not be used as the basis for prediction as naive historicists and econometricians have done. As demonstrated in *The Dynamic Society* (1996: ch. 12) these global-history timescapes reveal considerable regularity at the superficial level.

First, despite the impact of random exogenous forces, our statistical pictures show surprisingly regular wave-like fluctuations (rather than cycles) in the progress of all societies. These include the 'great waves' of *about* 300 years and 'long waves' of *about* 20 to 60 years that were experienced in the ancient, medieval, and modern eras alike. While these 'great' and 'long' waves appear to possess some regularity, it is of a superficial kind. We should not focus on the precision of either their duration or their recurrence (the old historicist fallacy), but on the underlying mechanisms that generate this wave-like growth. Second, these wave-like fluctuations were/are experienced in the New World as well as the Old World. Third, these society-specific wave-like fluctuations are an integral part of a global dynamic mechanism of 'technological paradigm shifts' (or economic revolutions), including the Paleolithic (hunting), the Neolithic (agriculture), and the Modern (industrial), that I have called the 'great steps of human progress'. This is discussed more fully below.

The significance of these quantitative timescapes at both the societal and global levels is that they describe the 'strategic pathways' taken by human society, pathways that can be generalized inductively but cannot be deduced logically. In addition, the qualitative pictures reveal patterns of institutional and organizational change of an economic, political, and social kind. These qualitative pictures, developed in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997), quite clearly show that institutional change is not an evolutionary process, as it sometimes reverses on itself in response to the unfolding of the dominant dynamic strategies.

What is the significance of these global-history timescapes? The first and essential point is that they are not ends in themselves, as they are for the positive historicists and the institutionalists, but merely a beginning. Their patterns merely reflect the superficial regularities of human experience – the ephemeral regularities of *outcome*. Eternal regularities are to be found only in the dynamic processes that underlie these surface patterns. Hence, the laws of history can only be derived from these underlying dynamic *processes*. It is because these dynamic processes have not been previ-

ously identified that we are told that history has no laws – that history is just the outcome of a cosmic lottery. The second point is that the causal relationships suggested by the timescapes must be tested empirically before we can construct our general dynamic model.

The general dynamic model is the second stage in our analysis. This 'dynamic-strategy' model is constructed inductively by applying the 'historical method' to our timescapes and other historical data. This model is capable of explaining how and why a society emerges, grows, stagnates, declines and, sometimes, collapses. It is a model concerned with the way human agents attempt to achieve their objectives in a variety of economic environments, why and how these ways are eventually exhausted, and why a previously successful society falters and, even, fails. It is a universal model because it can be used to explain the dynamics of human society throughout space and time once the specific fundamental conditions are known. It is a model, as shown in *The Dynamic Society* (1996: ch. 4), that can even be used to explain the dynamics of life over the past 4 billion years.

Discovering the historical mechanisms operating during a specific time and place is the third inductive step. While the general dynamic model can explain global history in general terms, it needs to be informed by specific historical conditions in order to discover the specific mechanisms that can explain the dynamics of individual technological eras. There are three fundamental conditions that must be explored. We need to know whether we are dealing with an 'open' or 'closed' society: this is a question of the degree of external competition. We need to know the degree to which global resources are fully employed, given the prevailing technological paradigm. And we need to know the nature of that paradigm.

The application of our general model to the prevailing historical conditions generates three distinct, yet related, dynamic mechanisms that span the entire history of the human race. They are the 'great dispersion' of the Paleolithic era (1.6 million years – 11,000 years BC), the 'great wheel of civilization' of the Neolithic era (11,000 years BC – AD 1750), and the 'great linear waves' of the industrial era (since AD 1750). These historical mechanisms are related to each other through the wider global dynamic that I have called the 'great technological paradigm shifts'.

While each of the three dynamic mechanisms is specific to its

own technological era, it is generally applicable in that era; and because the technological paradigm concept transcends historical eras, it is universally applicable. Also it would be possible for an earlier dynamic mechanism to reappear if we were able to change one of the prevailing fundamental historical conditions. If, for example, we were able to eliminate the condition of competition in the modern era, the future would see the re-emergence of the great wheel of civilization – of the eternal recurrence of war and conquest. Prediction of the future, therefore, depends on the ability to correctly establish the changing fundamental conditions of human society as well as the correct dynamic model.

The fourth step in the quaternary inductive method involves employing the dynamic-strategy model to explain institutional change. As shown in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997), institutional change can be explained as a response to the unfolding and replacement of dominant dynamic strategies. An unfolding dynamic strategy, driven by materialist man who is in pursuit of survival and prosperity, generates dynamic demand (what I call 'strategic demand') for a range of inputs including institutions and organizations. The central mechanism by which strategic demand is converted into institutional change is the competitive struggle between various strategic groups in society for control of the dominant dynamic strategy. I have called this the 'strategic struggle'. These struggling groups include the 'strategists' (profit-seekers), both old and new; the 'antistrategists' (rent-seekers), both conservative and radical; and the 'nonstrategists' (dependents). This model has nothing in common with Marx's concept of class struggle (Snooks 1997: 10–11; 1998a: 218–219). To show how this system works, I will review its component parts in greater detail.

## THE GENERAL DYNAMIC-STRATEGY MODEL

To fully understand global history and to make sensible predictions about the future it is essential that we isolate the laws of history. The primary laws of history – which are the fundamental laws of societal dynamics – can be derived from the general dynamic-strategy model developed in *The Dynamic Society* (1996) using the historical method. These primary laws are the building blocks for the derivation of the secondary (or historical) laws and of the tertiary (or institutional) laws.

The general model, derived from the study of global history, consists of four interrelated elements and one external and random force:

1) the competitive driving force of 'materialist man', which provides the model with its self-starting and self-maintaining nature;

2) the dynamic strategies – family multiplication, commerce, conquest, and technological change – which, in a competitive environment, are employed by the strategists (or entrepreneurs) to achieve their fundamental objective of survival and prosperity;

3) the competitive dynamic tactics of order and chaos, which are used by individuals and groups in the 'strategic struggle' to capture the gains made by the dynamic society;

4) the constraining effect provided by the eventual exhaustion of dynamic strategies, which for individual societies will lead to stagnation, downturn, crisis and, even, collapse; but which at the global level leads to technological paradigm shifts (the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Industrial Revolutions);

5) a system subject to random shocks, both minor (droughts and floods) and major (wars and disease).

Hence, the longrun driving force emerges from the nature of mankind – indeed of life itself – in competitive circumstances, and the wave-like process by which the transformation of society is achieved is due to the creative use of various dynamic strategies and to the ultimate exhaustion of those strategies. The dynamic constraints, in other words, which arise from the very sources of expansion and growth are internal to the model and are relative rather than absolute. Further discussion should clarify this model.

### **The driving force**

The driving force in human history, as in life itself, is the overwhelming desire to survive and prosper. This has been determined, in *The Dynamic Society* (1996), by a historical exploration of the nature of mankind, which I have called 'materialist man'. To achieve his objective, materialist man adopts the most effective available dynamic strategy. The framework of implicit costs and benefits involved in adopting a dynamic strategy is determined by the degree of external competition.

Think of those societies existing in any period as being distributed along a 'global scale of competitiveness', with those societies experiencing a very high degree of competitiveness at one ex-



treme, and those societies experiencing little or no external competition at the other extreme. Other societies will be located between these polar cases. We will need to divide the world into two parts – the Old World of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia on the one hand, and the New World of the Americas on the other – and to construct a scale of competitiveness for each. After the initial migrations from Siberia to the Americas, which began more than 40,000 years ago, both parts of the globe were effectively isolated from each other by rising seas (about 15,000 years ago) and thereafter operated as separate worlds. Societies at the highly competitive end of the Old-World scale include the classic ancient civilizations and Western European countries, while the best example of a closed society is Aboriginal Australia. Other societies in Eastern Europe, India, Africa, and China range between these two extremes. On the New-World scale of competitiveness are the Mesoamerican civilizations at the highly competitive end, and the Inuit (Eskimos) and the Tierra del Fuegians at the isolated end. Various North and South American cultures can be distributed along the scale between these extremes.

If the society in which we are interested is at the highly competitive end of this global scale, it will employ the most effective of the four dynamic strategies, whereas if at the non-competitive end it will choose either the family-multiplication strategy if unused resources are abundant, or the family-planning strategy – a static rather than a dynamic strategy – if all natural resources are fully employed. Both choices are rational in that they are directed at maximizing survival and prosperity given the perceived costs and benefits of alternative strategies. The closed society will rate the costs of technological change, commerce, and conquest strategies relative to the expected benefits as too high to bother adopting them. In contrast, the open society has to fight against powerful external forces for its very survival and, therefore, is prepared to adopt a high-cost strategy if it provides a competitive edge in the struggle for life and prosperity.

### **The choice of dynamic strategy**

Once an open society decides to opt for a dynamic strategy, there is a finite range from which to choose. This choice, which is influenced by the implicit benefits and costs of the alternatives, operates from the grassroots upwards. Individual investment proj-

ects are transformed into dynamic strategies for entire societies through the mechanisms of 'strategic imitation', by which less innovative economic agents imitate the investment activities of pioneering dynamic strategists in order to share in the supernormal profits.

Where natural resources are relatively abundant and, hence, relatively cheap, the family-multiplication strategy will be employed. This involves extending the family influence by reproduction and migration to adjoining areas. If, however, all natural resources are fully utilized at the prevailing level of technology and there is growing competition for these resources, a society has three dynamic options. It can pursue the dominant strategies of technological change, conquest, or commerce, often supported by one or more subsidiary strategies. The technological strategy involves increasing productivity by applying 'new' ideas to production and economic organization; the conquest strategy involves acquiring private and public income, land, and labor supplies (slaves) through systematic military activity; and the commerce strategy involves capturing a disproportionately large share of the gains from trade through monopoly pricing.

Each dominant dynamic strategy consists of a series of sub-strategies. These have been discussed in detail in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997). One example will illustrate the concept. In the modern technological strategy, which was introduced with the British Industrial Revolution, there have been five substrategies at the global level: the small-scale British production of textiles using new iron machinery and steam power (1780–1830); the larger scale, more capital-intensive production in Western Europe of engineering and chemical products (1830s–1870s); the mass production and mass distribution of consumer durables (particularly the car, radio, and television) by the United States to meet the demands of its own megamarket and later of the global market (1870s–1950s); the microelectronic technology pioneered by Japan and Germany in order to undercut US producers in the global market (1960s–1980s); and, finally, the technological competition between megastates, initially of the United States, USSR (until 1990), and the European Union, and in the future also of China and a rejuvenated Russia.

### The strategic struggle

Within a particular society, individuals and groups of individuals will employ a range of tactics to capture as much as possible of the gains made by the dynamic society, from the pursuit of their dynamic strategies. Those in power will attempt to impose order on their economic rivals (both internal and external), whereas those ambitious individuals without economic and political power will attempt to create chaos in order to topple the ruling elite. These are the 'dynamic tactics of order and chaos' that are employed in the strategic struggle for control of the sources of society's wealth. The order category includes various tactics aimed at maintaining and exploiting the *status quo*, ranging from rent-seeking to the imposition of restrictive regulations and ideology; and the chaos category includes tactics aimed at disrupting the existing order, ranging from deregulation and reform to protest and rebellion (including radical ideology such as Marxism or fundamentalist religion such as Islam). Those who are best able to handle competitive conditions tend to opt for chaos, in which they have a comparative advantage, and those who are least able to handle competition opt for order. It will be clear that the forces of order and chaos are tactics employed by materialist man to influence the distributional outcomes of the dynamic strategies. A healthy society is able to achieve a balance between these forces.

### The strategic exhaustion

The force constraining the expansion and growth of human society is not the supply of resources, natural or otherwise, but the exhaustion of its dynamic strategies and the inability to replace them with new strategies. This operates through the declining rate of return on investment of time and resources in the dominant dynamic strategy. Unless new strategies are adopted, or old strategies rejuvenated, a society will eventually grind to a halt – at least temporarily. This will occur when the marginal return to the dominant strategy is equal to its marginal cost. In other words, when an extra unit of investment in conquest, commerce, or technology only just pays for itself. At this stage in strategic development there is no incentive to undertake any further investment. This is what I have called a 'strategic crisis', which may lead to societal collapse if, as in all ancient societies, a nation develops to a size that greatly exceeds its technological base.

## THE DYNAMIC MECHANISMS OF HUMAN HISTORY

By employing both the timescapes and the general dynamic-strategy model we can identify and explain the three great interlocking mechanisms of the Dynamic Society that have been operating over the past two million years. Our general model generates distinct but related processes of economic change in different historical circumstances. But even these different circumstances are related to each other by an overarching global dynamic structure. This is the 'great technological paradigm shifts' (see Figure 1) that have been occurring at geometrically diminishing intervals since the emergence of mankind in the form of the Paleolithic (hunting), Neolithic (agricultural), and Industrial (modern) Revolutions. Within this global dynamic structure, the dominant mechanisms of change are, as stated earlier, the 'great dispersion' during the Paleolithic era, the 'great wheel of civilization' during the Neolithic era, and the 'great linear waves of economic change' during the modern era. Each of these mechanisms of transformation, driven by the materialist pursuit of dynamic strategies, has carried human society towards the upper limits of the prevailing technological paradigm and, hence, to a new technological paradigm shift.

### A global dynamic structure

As shown in *The Dynamic Society* (1996: ch. 12), the process by which global technological paradigm shifts emerge is accelerating in a geometric fashion. The time taken for the technological shifts to occur involved hundreds of thousands of years for the Paleolithic, 4,000 years for the Neolithic, and 100 years for the Industrial Revolution. The time taken to transmit these new paradigms around the known world was about 1.2 million years for the Paleolithic, 3,000 plus years for the Old-World Neolithic, and 200 plus years for the Industrial Revolution. And the interval between the Paleolithic and Neolithic Revolutions was about 2 million years, whereas that between the Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions was about 10,000 years. The reason for this global acceleration is that the outputs of one round of technological change become the inputs of the next.

The global development path implied by the great technological paradigm shifts can be illustrated by reference to Figure 1, which encompasses all societies in the known world in the history

of human society. It is designed to show two things: the stepped profile of *potential* real GDP per capita at the global level made possible by the three paradigm shifts (heavy line); and the more gradual increase in *actual* real GDP per capita (broken line). Potential GDP per capita increases relatively steeply – becoming more steep as we approach the present – but is then stationary for much longer periods that diminish geometrically over time. By contrast, actual GDP per capita increases only gradually to the potential ceiling and describes a more wave-like development path. This catching-up process by actual GDP per capita is driven by the three great mechanisms discussed more fully below. Once global resources have been fully employed in the current technological paradigm, actual income will press persistently against the potential ceiling. This is when the next technological revolution takes place, because the alternative is stagnation and collapse for the leading global societies.

### **The great dispersion**

The first historical mechanism to drive a technological paradigm shift was the great dispersion of the Paleolithic era. This involved the adoption of the extremely slow but very effective dynamic strategy of family multiplication (of procreation and migration) to enable greater family control over unused natural resources, which were utilized through a hunter-gatherer technology. This great dispersion probably began in Africa about 100,000 years ago. By 40,000 years ago modern man had reached most parts of the globe, and by 11,000 years ago in the Old World and 7,000 years ago in the New World all resources had been fully utilized – the Paleolithic ceiling of potential GDP per capita had been reached. This pressure on resources was most intense in those narrow necks of land – which I call ‘funnels of transformation’ – through which relatively large numbers of people passed and where competition was relatively high. In the fertile crescent of the Old World and the Mesoamerican isthmus of the New World the incentives for adopting new ways of using scarce resources were greatest. These were the cradles of the Neolithic Revolution.

### **The great wheel of civilization**

The mechanism driving the technological paradigm shift between the Neolithic and Modern eras was what I call the ‘great

wheel of civilization'. Each rotation of the great wheel brought the Dynamic Society closer to the limit of the old Neolithic paradigm through population expansion and the transmission of ideas. This dynamic process, which underlies the rise and fall of ancient civilizations in both the Old and New Worlds, was in turn driven by the dynamic strategy of conquest. The reason for the eternal recurrence of the ancient world is that the conqueror must rebuild his empire anew on each and every occasion. Only through the modern technological strategy can the great wheel be broken and civilization be set free to pursue a sustained linear development path. Yet even this escape will not be permanent if we forget how we broke away.

The great wheel of ancient civilization rotates slowly in historical space without gaining the technological traction required to drive global GDP per capita upwards over the longrun. In Figure 2, four great wheels of economic growth have been depicted, each of which represents a single ancient Western civilization in a series of successions – Sumer, Assyria, Greece, and Rome. While the diameters of the wheels are slightly different owing to a marginal improvement in living standards over time as military and organizational structures became more efficient, they have a common axis, which is fixed by a shared production technology. It is well known that, while military technology changed significantly over these three millennia, production technology changed only marginally.

How does the 'great-wheel' diagram work? It is important to realize that while the 'great-steps' diagram (Figure 1) operates at the global level, the 'great-wheel' diagram (Figure 2) operates at the level of the individual society; and that time on the horizontal axis is not continuous (that is, time cannot move back on itself). Each rotation of the great wheel for these societies took between one and two millennia. We start at the low point of the wheel. The origin, *a*, of each civilization is small and unimpressive and, with the exception of the pioneering society of Sumer, is overshadowed by its predecessor. As the internal energy of materialist man is translated into economic expansion through, initially, family multiplication, the incipient core of our new civilization borrows ideas and techniques from its predecessor and applies these to its expansion process. As real GDP per capita grows, the great wheel begins to turn slowly anew. Once our society has borrowed all it can from the past, the wheel has reached point *b*, the maximum level of real

GDP per capita that can be generated from the neolithic economic system common to the ancient world.

This is a critical point at which the great wheel could stop, and even rotate backwards. The most cost-effective way of maintaining positive economic growth in ancient societies – of maintaining the upward swing of the great wheel – is through the adoption of the dynamic strategy of conquest. Only a fortunate few were able to achieve this through commerce (the Archaic Greeks and the Phoenicians) and even these were eventually overwhelmed by conquest societies. For a successful conquest society, the great wheel continues to rotate upwards from *b* to *c* as the flow of plundered income and resources from outside increases. But, inevitably, the conquest (or commerce) strategy is exhausted, the inflow of external resources dries up, the former conquest society is thrown back on its own resources. Hence, the great wheel begins to rotate downwards to *d* and beyond. The stationary state is not possible in a highly competitive world. As the underlying neolithic production technology is not sufficient to support such high living standards and populations, the great wheel rotates from *d* to *e*, and eventually disintegrates (back to *a*) as Rome did between AD 200 and 476.

### **The great linear waves of economic change**

The Industrial Revolution not only ushered in a new technological paradigm, it also began a new era in which linear, if fluctuating, economic growth was possible. This was unprecedented in human history. The great linear waves of economic change are generated by the modern technological strategy and its component substrategies.

It is important to realize that these wave-like surges of about 300 years are not systematically related in some sort of mechanical way as orthodox trade-cycle theory might, if it recognized them, claim. In reality there is no system of very long cycles. The intervals between these great waves are just that – intervals between the exhaustion of one dynamic strategy and the emergence and exploitation of another. During each of these intervals – a period of 'hiatus' – the strategic pioneers are involved in a desperate attempt to launch a new strategy owing to the adverse impact of external competition on real living standards. Each hiatus is a vulnerable time for any society, because strategic replacement is not inevita-

ble. Failure to generate a new strategy will lead a society to stagnate and, possibly, collapse. It is for this reason I stress that modern linear development takes place through a succession of unsystematic 'waves' rather than through mechanical cycles in which downturn and contraction are followed necessarily by upturn and expansion.

The precise length of these waves, measured not from peak to peak as in trade cycles but from trough to peak as in wave-like fluctuations, should not concern us greatly. My research for *The Dynamic Society* (1996) and *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997) suggests that the upswing of the 'great waves' (reflecting the unfolding of full dynamic strategies) in both the ancient and modern worlds is *about* 300 years in duration, and of the 'long waves' (reflecting the unfolding of substrategies) is *about* 20 to 60 years. Random external shocks help to distort this pattern. Far more important is the dynamic mechanism that underlies these wave-like surges. Any predictions we are prepared to make about economic progress in the future must be based on the underlying dynamic model, and the laws that can be derived from it, rather than on fixed (and, hence, inevitably wrong) assertions about wave-length. Much of the recent (and distant) literature has focused, mistakenly, on the predictive value of cycle-length. As a result it has been largely discredited (Solomou 1987). This is the old historicists fallacy revisited.

## THE STRATEGIC MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Societal rules (or 'institutions'), both formal (laws) and informal (customs), are established and altered to facilitate the dynamic strategies by which decision makers attempt to maximize their chances of survival and prosperity; and to impose the dynamic tactics by which competing groups attempt to control the distribution of society's wealth. These rules are required to economize not on cost-benefit information as Douglass North (1990) and the new institutionalists assert but on nature's scarcest resource – the intellect. Similarly, societal 'organizations' of all types – economic, political, and social – also largely respond to these dynamic strategies and tactics, rather than to institutions as the new institutionalists suggest. Society's institutions and organizations, therefore, are driven not by some sort of evolutionary process as commonly



claimed but by strategic demand that arises from the unfolding of the dominant dynamic strategy. Social evolution is a myth.

Strategic demand provides the incentives, opportunities, and imperatives for the changing – the ephemeral – structure of civilization. As shown in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997), the strategic phases of adoption, expansion, decline, and exhaustion have a characteristic impact on observed changes in the institutional/organizational structure of society. Institutional change has no life of its own. It cannot evolve in isolation from what is happening in the real economy. It is reactive not proactive, facilitating not initiating. It has no evolutionary logic and, therefore, no laws of its own.

If the longrun 'strategic sequence' were to reverse itself, the sociopolitical structure would also do so. The only reason that the last millennium in Britain gives the impression that democratic sociopolitical institutions and organizations have 'evolved' is that the strategic sequence has been conquest, commerce, technological change (the reason is discussed in *The Ephemeral Civilization*, 1997: 338–340). Had it been conquest, commerce, as it was throughout the premodern period (for example, ancient Greece and medieval Venice), then the growing democratization of the middle, commerce phase would have been turned back to autocracy once more. The same will happen in the future if our current technological strategy is replaced by a conquest strategy (as occurred in Germany and Japan in the mid twentieth century), by, for example, a fanatical ecological dictator. This, of course, is not possible in the evolutionary model, where non-marginal change is irreversible. In the end it must be recognized that human civilization is merely a vehicle for achieving the basic desires of mankind, and that, while the dynamic process is eternal, the rites of civilization are ephemeral.

The central mechanism of institutional change in the dynamic-strategy model is the competitive struggle between various groups in society for control of the dominant dynamic strategy. This is the struggle, referred to above, between strategists, nonstrategists, and antistrategists. The only reason modern societies possess democratic sociopolitical institutions is that their entire populations have been drawn into the ruling strategic group. This has not been a linear, but a circular, historical development. Whereas in hunter-gather societies most of their populations were strategists, in conquest societies the landowning warriors constituted a tiny ruling

elite, in commerce societies their ruling class was extended to include the mercantile middle class, and in technological societies the ruling class embraced, once more, the bulk of the population who invested funds and/or skills in the modern dynamic strategy. The way this works is discussed in detail in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997).

The point I am trying to make is that, as there is no independent dynamic mechanism underlying institutional change, there can be no independent laws governing it. The great quest of the new institutionalists to discover a general model of societal rules, therefore, is futile. It is a quest for the Holy Grail. While there certainly are regularities, or recurring patterns, in institutional formation throughout space and time, they are the outcome of the real economy's dynamic and not of any independent institutional mechanism. Hence, the laws of institutional change must be derived from the fundamental laws of social dynamics. The ephemeral nature of civilization can only be understood in terms of the eternal forces that drive the Dynamic Society.

## DERIVING THE LAWS OF HISTORY

The laws of history can be derived from global history using the above quaternary system of analysis. But to do so we must focus not on the timescapes – this was the old historicist fallacy – but rather on the general dynamic-strategy model, the historical mechanisms, and the dynamic-strategy model of institutional change. Just as there are three sources for the laws of history operating at different levels of human experience, so there are three categories of laws (as shown in the Appendix). Those derived from the general model are the 'primary laws of history' (or the 'laws of societal dynamics'), which govern both the behavior of individuals as they pursue their objectives of survival and prosperity through the most effective dynamic strategy, and the way societies respond to these strategies. These primary laws are relevant to all historical eras, and they do not imply inevitability as they only encompass those who freely choose to survive and prosper.

The 'secondary laws of history' (or the 'laws of historical change') are derived from the dynamic mechanisms underlying the historical development in each of the three great eras – the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, and the Modern – of human history. These

laws underpin the technological paradigm shifts, the great dispersion, the great wheel of civilization, and the great linear waves of economic change. As these mechanisms were reconstructed in my global-history trilogy by applying the general dynamic-strategy model to the timescapes, the secondary laws can be thought of as being derived from the primary laws. They amplify and support those laws.

Finally, the 'tertiary laws of history' (or the 'laws of institutional change') are derived from the dynamic-strategy model employed in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997) to analyze institutional change. They explain the changing democratization of sociopolitical institutions, together with their changing complexity, cohesion, and viability. These laws show why the idea of social evolution, as postulated by the institutionalists and sociobiologists, is a myth. As the dynamic-strategy model used here was constructed from both the general model and the historical dynamic mechanisms, the tertiary laws can be thought of as being derived jointly from the primary and secondary laws of history in a global-history context.

## THE ROLE OF THE LAWS OF HISTORY

The laws of history not only enable us to further the work of global history but also provide us with the opportunity to construct a new generation of dynamic models and to predict the future of human society. In doing so they open up new intellectual and policy horizons. They allow us to see our own society in the more objective way that we have long been able to see the physical world.

The laws of history provide the building blocks for a new approach to social dynamics and, indeed, to the social sciences. The deductivist approach to the longrun has had its chance over the past 300 years and it has failed. Neoclassical growth models are unable to encompass the dynamics of the developed, let alone the underdeveloped, world. Hence, it is beyond reason that the new economic historians should adopt this failed approach in a futile attempt to examine historical dynamics. It is time for a more realistic inductive approach to these issues, as outlined here.

The ultimate test for any laws of history is that they not only

throw light on the dynamic processes of global history but that they become the foundation for a new generation of dynamic theory relevant to all the social sciences. Any set of 'laws' that cannot pass this test must be relegated to the garbage bin of history. What is encouraging about the laws discussed here (presented for the first time in *The Laws of History*, 1998a), is that they have already been used to develop formal economic and political models of the dynamics of the rich (see my *Longrun Dynamics. A General Economic and Political Theory*, 1998b) and poor (*Global Transition. A General Theory of Economic Development*, 1999) countries. And this is only the beginning of a new approach to the social sciences that has its origins in global history.

The other important role for the laws of history is the prediction of the future of human society. This prediction concerns not the events of the future but the dynamic processes underlying these events. Just as the laws of history have been derived from the dynamic processes underlying the surface of everyday events, so prediction must be confined to the future operation of those dynamic forces at both the fundamental and institutional levels. In this way we can provide answers to the big questions about the future of human society – big questions concerning the direction that economic growth, population increase, and natural resource depletion are taking us, and concerning the appropriate role of government policy. Some of these questions have been addressed in my global-history and social-dynamics trilogies. Much, however, remains to be done with this inductive approach to the social sciences. And if it were done, we could witness a revolution in the social sciences to rival that in the natural sciences.

## **APPENDIX: A CHECK-LIST OF THE LAWS OF HISTORY**

Space prevents a full specification and discussion of the laws derived from global history. That discussion can be found in my *The Laws of History* (1998a), pp. 193–239. This is just a check-list to show the structure and coverage of these laws.

### **I. The primary laws**

1. The law of human motivation

2. The law of competitive intensity
3. The law of strategic optimization
4. The law of strategic imitation
5. The law of strategic struggle
6. The law of diminishing strategic returns
7. The law of strategic crisis
8. The law of societal collapse

## II. The secondary laws

9. The law of cumulative technological change
10. The law of technological revolution
11. The law regulating the optimal size of societies
12. The law of human dispersion
13. The law of eternal recurrence
14. The law of economic progress
15. The law of dynamic regression

## III. The tertiary laws

16. The fundamental law of institutional change
17. The law of democratization
18. The law of social complexity
19. The law of social cohesion
20. The law of social unrest
21. The law of institutional economy
22. The law of antistrategic political collapse

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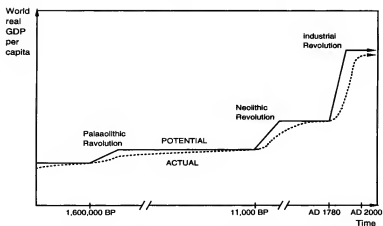
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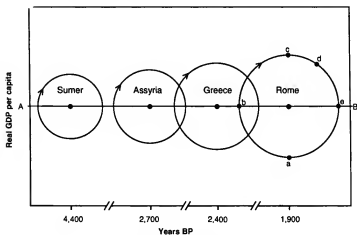
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**Figure 1: The great steps of human progress**



Source: Snooks 1996: 403.

**Figure 2: The great wheel of civilization**



Source: Snooks 1996: 407.

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## Alternative Pathways of Social Evolution\*

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It has always been peculiar to evolutionists to compare social and biological evolution, the latter as visualized by Charles Darwin.<sup>1</sup> But it also seems possible and correct to draw an analogy with another great discovery in the field of evolutionary biology, with the homologous series of Nikolay Vavilov (1921; 1927; 1967). However, there is no complete identity between cultural parallelism and biological homologous series. Vavilov studied the morphological homology, whereas our focus within the realm of social evolution is the functional one. No doubt, the morphological homomorphism also happens in the process of social evolution (e.g. in the Hawaii Islands where a type of the sociocultural organization surprisingly similar with the ones of other highly developed parts of Polynesia had independently formed by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [Sahlins 1972/1958; Goldman 1970; Earle 1978]). But this topic is beyond the present paper's *problématique*.

What is important for us here is that there are reasons to suppose that an equal level of sociopolitical (and cultural) complexity (which makes it possible to solve equally difficult problems faced by societies) can be achieved not only in various forms but on essentially different evolutionary pathways, too. Thus, it is possible



to achieve the same level of system complexity through differing pathways of evolution which appeared simultaneously (and even prior to the formation of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* [Butovskaya and Feinberg 1993; Butovskaya 1994; 2000; Butovskaya, Korotayev, and Kazankov 2000]) and increased in quantity alongside sociocultural advancement (Pavlenko 1996: 229–251; 2000). Diversity could be regarded as one of the most important preconditions of the evolutionary process. This implies that the transition to any qualitatively new forms is normally not possible without a sufficient level of variability of sociocultural forms (among both the given culture's predecessors and contemporaries).

Within the first level of analysis, all evolutionary variability can be reduced to two principally different groups of homologous series (Bondarenko 1997: 12–15; 1998a; 2000; Bondarenko and Korotayev 1999; 2000b; Korotayev *et al.* 2000). Earlier these alternatives were distinguished either as 'hierarchical' vs. 'nonhierarchical' (e.g. Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a), or 'hierarchical' vs. 'heterarchical' (e.g. Ehrenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995; Crumley 2001).

In a recent publication on the problem of heterarchy the latter is defined as '... the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways' (Ehrenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995: 3; see also Crumley 1979: 144). It is clear that the second version of heterarchy is most relevant for the study of the complex societies.

However, when we have a system of elements which 'possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways', it seems impossible to speak about the absence of hierarchy. In this case we rather deal with a system of heterarchically arranged hierarchies. Hence, it does not appear reasonable to denote the heterarchy alternative as 'hierarchy'. We would rather suggest to designate it as 'homoarchy' which could be defined as '... the relation of elements to one another when they possess the potential for being ranked in one way only'. Totalitarian regimes of any time give us plenty of examples of such a sociocultural situation when the ruled have no chances to get ranked above the rulers in any possible contexts. This stands in a sharp contrast with, say, an archetypal example of a complex heterarchical system – the civil community (*polis*) of Athens (the 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) where the citizens ranked lower within one hierarchy (e.g. the military one) could well be ranked higher in many other possible respects (e.g. economically, or within the subsystem of civil/religious magistrates). Consequently, it was impossible to say that one citizen was higher than any other in any absolute sense.

On the other hand, it seems necessary to stress that it appears impossible to find not only any human cultures totally lacking any hierarchies (including informal ones), but also any totally homoarchival cultures. Hence, though in order to simplify our analysis in this paper we speak about heterarchical and homoarchival evolutionary pathways, in fact we are dealing here with heterarchy – homoarchy axis along which one could range all the known human cultures. Within this range there does not seem to be any distinct border between homoarchival and heterarchical cultures; hence, in reality it might be more appropriate to speak not about just two evolutionary pathways (heterarchical and homoarchival), but about a potentially infinite number of such pathways, and, thus, finally not about evolutionary pathways, but rather about evolutionary probability field (see for detail Korotayev *et al.* 2000). Yet, as was mentioned above, in order to simplify our analysis we speak about just two alternative pathways.

In particular, until recently it was considered self-evident that just the formation of the state<sup>2</sup> marked the end of the 'Primitive Epoch' and alternatives to the state did not actually exist. All the stateless societies were considered pre-state ones, standing on the single evolutionary staircase squarely below the states. Nowadays postulates about the state as the only possible form of political and sociocultural organization of the post-primitive society, about *a priori* higher level of development of a state society in comparison with any non-state one do not seem so undeniable as a few years ago. It has become evident that the non-state societies are not necessarily less complex and less efficient. The problem of existence of non-state but not primitive (*i.e.* principally *non-* and not *pre-*state) societies, alternatives to the state (as the allegedly inevitable post-primitive form of the sociopolitical organization) deserves attention.

Of course, in no way do we reject the fact of existence and importance of the states in world history. What we argue, is that the state is not the only possible post-'primitive' evolutionary form. From our point of view, the state is nothing more than one of many forms of the post-primitive sociopolitical organization; these forms are alternative to each other and are able to transform to one another without any loss in the general level of complexity. Hence, the degree of sociopolitical centralization and 'homoarchization' is not a perfect criterion for evaluating a society's evolutionary level, though it is regarded as such within unilinear concepts of social evolution.

As Brumfiel wrote several years ago, 'the coupling of [socio-political] differentiation and hierarchy is so firm in our minds that it takes tremendous intellectual efforts even imagine what differentiation without hierarchy could be' (Brumfiel 1995: 130).<sup>3</sup> Usually, even if the very existence of complex but non-homoarchical cultures is recognized, they are regarded as a historical fortuity, as an anomaly. Such cultures are declared as if capable to reach rather low levels of complexity only, as if incapable to find internal stability (Tuden and Marshall 1972: 454–456).

Thus, on the further level of analysis the dichotomy turns out not to be rigid at all as far as actual organization of any society employs both vertical (dominance – subordination) and horizontal (apprehended as ties among equals) links. Furthermore, in the course of their history, societies (including archaic cultures) turn out capable to change models of sociopolitical organization radically, transforming from homoarchical into heterarchical or *vice versa* (Crumley 1987: 164–165; 1995: 4; 2001; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; Dozhdev 2000; Kradin 2000a). Perhaps the most well known historical example of the latter case is Rome where the Republic was established and further democratized with the Plebian political victories. Note that in the course of such transformations the organizational background changes, but the overall level of cultural complexity may not only increase or decrease but may well stay practically the same (for examples from ancient and medieval history of Europe, the Americas, Asia see, e.g. van der Vliet 1987; Ferguson 1991; Korotayev 1995a; 1996a; Levy 1995; Lynsha 1998; Beliaev 2000; Chamblee 2000: 15–35; Dozhdev 2000; Kowalewski 2000; Kradin 2000a).

Nevertheless, vertical and horizontal links play different parts in different societies at every concrete moment. Already among the primates with the same level of morphological and cognitive development, and even among primate populations belonging to the same species, one could observe both more and less hierarchically organized groups. Hence, the non-linearity of sociopolitical evolution appears to originate already before the *Homo Sapiens* formation (Butovskaya and Feinberg 1993; Butovskaya 1994; Butovskaya, Korotayev, and Kazankov 2000).

Let us consider now in more detail one of the most influential and widespread unilineal evolutionary schemes, the one proposed by Service (1962/1971; its outline is, however, already contained in Sahlins 1960: 37): *band – tribe – chiefdom – state*. The scheme implies that the growth of the political complexity (at least up to

the stage of the agrarian state) is inevitably accompanied by the growth of the inequality, stratification, the social distance between the rulers and the ruled, the 'authoritarianism' and hierarchization of the political system, decrease of the political participation of the main mass of population etc. Of course, these two sets of parameters seem to be related rather closely. It is evident that we observe here a certain correlation, and a rather strong one. But, no doubt, this is just a correlation, and by no means a functional dependence. Of course, this correlation implies a perfectly possible line of sociopolitical evolution – from an egalitarian, acephalous band, through a big-man village community with much more pronounced inequality and political hierarchy, to an 'authoritarian' village community with a strong power of its chief (found *e.g.* among some Indians of the North-West Coast – see *e.g.* Carneiro 2000), and then through the true chiefdoms having even more pronounced stratification and concentration of the political power in the hands of the chief, to the complex chiefdoms where the political inequality parameters reach a qualitatively higher levels, and finally to the agrarian state where all such parameters reach their culmination (though one could move even further, up to the level of the 'empire' [*e.g.* Adams 1975]). However, it is very important to stress that on each level of the growing political complexity one could find easily evident alternatives to this evolutionary line.

Let us start with the human societies of the simplest level of sociocultural complexity. Indeed, one can easily observe that acephalous egalitarian bands are found among most of the unspecialized hunter-gatherers. However, as has been shown by Woodburn (1972; 1979; 1980; 1982; 1988a; 1988b) and Artemova (1987; 1991; 1993; 2000a; 2000b; Chudinova 1981; see also Whyte 1978: 49–94), some of such hunter-gatherers (the inegalitarian ones, first of all most of the Australian aborigines) display a significantly different type of sociopolitical organization with much more structured political leadership concentrated in the hands of relatively hierarchically organized elders, with a pronounced degree of inequality both between the men and women, and among the men themselves.

On the next level of the political complexity we can also find communities with both homoarchival and heterarchical political organization. One can mention *e.g.* the well-known contrast between the Indians of the Californian North-West and South-East:

The Californian chiefs were in the center of economic life, they exercised their control over the production, distribution and ex-

change of the social product, and their power and authority were based mainly on this. Gradually the power of the chiefs and elders acquired the hereditary character, it became a typical phenomenon for California... Only the tribes populating the North-West of California, notwithstanding their respectively developed and complex material culture, lacked the explicitly expressed social roles of the chiefs characteristic for the rest of California. At the meantime they new slavery... The population of this region had an idea of personal wealth... (Kabo 1986: 20).

One can also immediately recall the communities of Ifugao (*e.g.* Barton 1922; Meshkov 1982: 183–197) lacking any pronounced authoritarian political leadership compared with the one of the communities of the North-West Coast, but with a comparable level of overall sociopolitical and sociocultural complexity.

Hence, already on the levels of simple and middle range communities we observe several types of alternative sociopolitical forms, each of which should be denoted with a separate term. The possible alternatives to the chiefdom in the prehistoric Southwest Asia, heterarchical systems of complex acephalous communities with a pronounced autonomy of single family households have been analyzed recently by Berezkin who suggests reasonably Apa Tanis as their ethnographic parallel (1995a; 1995b; 2000). Frantsouzoff finds an even more developed example of such type of politics in ancient South Arabia in Wadi Hadramawt of the 1st millennium BC (1995; 1997; 2000).

Another evident alternative to the chiefdom is constituted by the tribal organization. As is well known, the tribe has found itself on the brink of being evicted from the evolutionary models (Townsend 1985: 146; Carneiro 1987: 760). However, the political forms entirely identical with what was described by Service as the tribe could be actually found in *e.g.* medieval and modern Middle East (up to the present): these tribal systems normally comprise several communities and often have precisely the type of political leadership described by Service as typical for the tribe. (Service 1971/1962: 103–104; Dresch 1984: 39, 41).

The point is that we are dealing here with some type of polity that could not be identified either with bands, or with village communities (because such tribes normally comprise more than one community), or with chiefdoms (because they have an entirely different type of political leadership), or, naturally, with states. They could not be inserted easily either in the scheme somewhere between the village and the chiefdom. Indeed, as has been shown

convincingly by Carneiro (see *e.g.* 1970; 1981; 1987; 1991; 2000), chiefdoms normally arose as a result of political centralization of a few communities without the stage of the tribe preceding this. On the other hand, a considerable amount of evidence could be produced suggesting that in the Middle East many tribes arose as a result of political decentralization of chiefdoms which preceded the tribes in time. It is also important to stress that this could not in any way be identified with a 'regression', 'decline', or 'degeneration', as we can observe in many of such cases that political decentralization is accompanied by the increase (rather than decrease) of overall sociocultural complexity (Korotayev 1995a; 1995c; 1995d; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1997; 1998; 2000a; 2000b). Hence, in many respects tribal systems of the Middle Eastern type appear to be chiefdom alternatives (rather than chiefdom predecessors).

We have argued elsewhere (Korotayev 1995b) that in general there is an evident evolutionary alternative to the development of the rigid supra-communal political structures (chiefdom – complex chiefdom – state) constituted by the development of internal communal structures together with soft supra-communal systems not alienating communal sovereignty (various confederations, amphictyonies etc.). One of the most impressive results of the sociopolitical development along this evolutionary line is the Greek *poleis* (see [Berent 1994; 1996; 2000a; 2000b] regarding the statelessness of this type of political systems) some of which reached overall levels of complexity quite comparable not only with the ones of chiefdoms, but also with the one of states. The same can be said about its Roman analogue, the *civitas* (Shtaerman 1989). Note that *polis/civitas* as a form of sociopolitical organization was known far beyond the Classical world, both in geographical and chronological sense (Korotayev 1995b; Bondarenko 1998b), though quite a number of scholars still insist on its uniqueness.

The 'tribal' and '*polis*' series seem to constitute separate evolutionary lines, with some distinctive features: the '*polis*' forms imply the power of the 'magistrates' elected in one or another way for fixed periods and controlled by the people in the absence (or near-absence) of any formal bureaucracy. Within the tribal systems we observe the absence of any offices whose holders would be obeyed simply because they hold posts of a certain type, and the order is sustained by elaborate mechanisms of mediation and search for consensus.

There is also a considerable number of other complex stateless polities (like the ones of the Cossacks of Ukraine and Southern Russia till the end of the 17th century [Chirkin 1955; Rozner 1970; Nikitin 1987; etc.], the Celts of the 5th – 1st centuries BC [Kradin 2000c: 149], or the Icelandic polity of the 'Age of Democracy' till the middle of the 13th century [Olgeirsson 1957; Gurevich 1972; Steblin-Kamenskij 1984]) which could not yet be denoted with any commonly accepted terms, and whose own self-designations are often too complex (like *Kazach'e Vojsko*) to have any chance to get transformed into general terms. Such examples can of course be further multiplied.

And this is not all. There is another evident problem with Service's scheme. It is evidently pre-'Wallersteinian', not touched by any world-system discussions, quite confident about the possibility of the use of a single polity as a unit of social evolution. It might be not so important if Service were speaking about the typology of polities; yet, he speaks about the 'levels of cultural integration', and within such a context the world-system dimension should be evidently taken into consideration.<sup>4</sup>

The point is that the same overall level of complexity could be achieved both through the development of a single polity and through the development of a politically uncentralized interpolity network. This alternative was already noticed by Wallerstein (1974; 1979; 1987) who viewed it as a dichotomy: *world-economy* – *world-empire*. Note that according to Wallerstein these are considered precisely as alternatives, and not two stages of social evolution. As one would expect, we agree with Wallerstein whole-heartedly at this point. However, we also find here a certain oversimplification. In general, we would like to stress that we are dealing here with a particular case of a much more general set of evolutionary alternatives.

The development of a politically uncentralized interpolity network became an effective alternative to the development of a single polity long before the rise of the first empires. As an example, we could mention the interpolity communication network of the Mesopotamian civil-temple communities of the first half of the 3rd millennium BC which sustained a much higher level of technological development than that of the politically unified Egyptian state, contemporary to it. Note that the intercommunal communication networks already constitute an effective evolutionary alternative to the chiefdom. *E.g.* the sociopolitical system of the Apa Tanis should be better described as an intercommunal network of a

few communities (incidentally, in turn acting as a core for another wider network including the neighboring less developed polities [chiefdoms and sovereign communities] – see Führer-Haimendorf 1962).

We also do not find it productive to describe this alternative type of cultural integration as a world-economy. The point is that such a designation tends to downplay the political and cultural dimension of such systems. Take for example, the Classical Greek inter-*polis* system. The level of complexity of many Greek *poleis* was rather low even in comparison with a complex chiefdom. However, they were parts of a much larger and much more complex entity constituted by numerous economic, political and cultural links and shared political and cultural norms. The economic links no doubt played some role within this system. But links of other types were not less important. Take, e.g. the norm according to which the inter-*poleis* wars stopped during the Olympic Games, which guaranteed the secure passage of people, and consequently the circulation of enormous quantities of energy, matter and information within the territory far exceeding the one of an average complex chiefdom. The existence of the inter-*poleis* communication network made it possible, say, for a person born in one *polis* to go to get his education in another *polis* and to establish his school in a third. The existence of this system reduced the destructiveness of inter-*poleis* warfare for a long time. It was a basis on which it was possible to undertake important collective actions (which turned out to be essential at the age of the Greek-Persian wars). As a result, the *polis* with a level of complexity lower than the one of the complex chiefdom, turned out to be part of a system whose complexity was quite comparable with that of the state (and not only the early one).

The same can be said about the intersocietal communication network of Medieval Europe (comparing its complexity in this case with an average world-empire). Note that in both cases some parts of the respective systems could be treated as elements of wider world-economies. On the other hand, not all the parts of such communication networks were quite integrated economically. This shows that the world-economies were not the only possible type of politically decentralized intersocietal networks. Actually, in both cases we are dealing with the politically decentralized civilization, which for most of human history over the last few millennia, constituted the most effective alternative to the world-empire. Of course, many of such civilizations could be treated as



parts of larger world-economies. Wallerstein suggests that in the age of complex societies only the world-economies and world-empires ('historical systems', *i.e.* the largest units of social evolution) could be treated as units of social evolution in general. Yet we believe that both politically centralized and decentralized civilizations should also be treated as such. One should stress again the importance of the cultural dimension of such systems. Of course, the exchange of bulk goods was important. But exchange of information was also important. Note that the successful development of science both in Classical Greece and Medieval Europe became only possible through an intensive intersocietal information exchange, whereas the development of science in Europe affected, to a significant extent, the evolution of the Modern World-System.

It is important to stress that the intersocietal communication networks could appear among much less complex societies (Wallerstein has denoted them as 'mini-systems' without actually studying them, for a recent review of the research on the archaic intersocietal networks see Chase-Dunn and Grimes 1995; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993; 1994; 1995; 1997). Already it seems possible to speak about a communication network covering most of aboriginal Australia. Again we come here across a similar phenomenon – a considerable degree of cultural complexity (complex forms of rituals, mythology, arts, and dance well comparable with the ones of early agriculturists) observed among populations with an apparently rather simple political organization. This could largely be explained by the fact that relatively simple Australian local groups were parts of a much more complex whole: a huge intersocietal communication network that apparently covered most of Australia (*e.g.* Bakhta, Senyuta 1972; Artemova 1987).

Thus, it is possible to contrast societies that followed the pathway of political centralization and 'authoritarianization' with cultures that further elaborated and perfected democratic communal backgrounds and corresponding self-government institutions. However, such a culture as the Benin Kingdom of the 13<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries can make the picture of sociopolitical evolution even more versatile. In particular, it reveals that not only heterarchical but also homoarchival societies can reach a very high (incomparably higher than that of complex chiefdoms) level of sociocultural complexity and political centralization still never transforming into a state during the whole long period of existence. The Benin evidence also testifies that local community's autonomy is not a

guarantee of complex society's advancement along the heterarchical pathway. We have suggested elsewhere to define this form of sociopolitical organization as 'megacommunity' (see e.g. Bondarenko 1994; 1995a: 276–284; 1995b; 2001: 232–249). Its structure may be depicted in the shape of four concentric circles forming an upset cone. These 'circles' are as follows: the extended family, extended-family community (in which familial ties were supplemented by those of neighbor ones), chiefdom, and finally, the broadest circle that included all the three narrower ones, that is the megacommunity as such (the Benin Kingdom as a whole). The specific characteristic of megacommunity is its ability to organize a complex, 'many-tier' society predominantly on the basis of transformed kinship principle within rather vast territories.

Still, another evident alternative to the state seems to be represented by the supercomplex chiefdoms created by some nomads of Eurasia – the number of the structural levels within such chiefdoms appear to be equal, or even to exceed those within the average state, but they have an entirely different type of political organization and political leadership; such type of political entities do not appear to have been ever created by the agriculturists (e.g. Kradin 1992: 146–152; 1996; 2000a; 2000b).

Besides the Benin megacommunity and nomadic supercomplex chiefdoms, the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu power can serve as an example at this point. Within that vast and mighty militaristic power one can observe high degree of supracommunal institutions' hierarchization and high rigidity of this institutional hierarchy (see, e.g. Gluckman 1940; Ritter 1955). Societies with profoundly elaborated rigid caste systems may be a homoarchival alternative to also homoarchival (by the very definition; see Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 533–596, 637–650) early states, too (Quigley 1999: 114–169; Kobishchanov 2000: 64).

So, alternativity characterizes not only two basic macrogroups of human associations, i.e. homoarchival and heterarchical societies. Alternativity does exist within each of them, too. In particular, within the upper range of complexity and integrativity of the sociopolitical organization the state (at least in the pre-industrial world) 'competes' with not only heterarchical systems of institutions (e.g. with *polis*) but also with some forms of sociopolitical organization not less homoarchival than the state.

Among numerous factors capable to influence the nature of this or that society, the family and community type characteristic of it seems to deserve notice. The distinction in the correlation of kin

and neighborhood (territorial) lines is in its turn connected with the dominant type of community (as a universal substratum social institution). A cross-cultural research conducted earlier (Bondarenko and Korotayev 1999; 2000b) has generally corroborated the initial hypothesis (Bondarenko 1997: 13–14; 1998b: 198–199) that the extended-family community in which vertical social ties and non-democratic value system are usually vividly expressed, being given the shape of kinship relations (elder – younger), is more characteristic of homoarchival societies.<sup>5</sup> Heterarchical societies appear to be more frequently associated with the territorial communities consisting of nuclear families in which social ties are horizontal and apprehended as neighborhood ties among those equal in rights.<sup>6</sup>

In the course of our cross-cultural research in the community forms, another factor important for determining societies' homoarchization vs. heterarchization was revealed. It appeared that probability of a democratic (heterarchical) sociopolitical organization development is higher in cultures where monogamous rather polygynous families dominate (Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000).

However, besides social factors (including those mentioned above), a set of phenomena stemming from the fact that political culture is a reflection of a society's general culture type, is also important for determining its evolutionary pathway. The general culture type that varies from one civilization to another defines the trends and limits of sociocultural evolution. Though culture itself forms under the influence of different factors (sociohistorical, natural, etc.) the significance of the general culture type for the sociopolitical organization is not at all reduced to the so-called 'ideological factor' (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; Claessen 2000b). It influences crucially the essence of political culture characteristic for a given society, 'most probably revealing itself as fully as economic, religious, artistic potential from the very beginning' (Zubov 1991: 59). In its turn, political culture determines human vision of the ideal sociopolitical model which correspondingly, may be different in various cultures. This way political culture forms the background for the development of character, types and forms of complex political organization emergence, including the enrolling of this process along either the homoarchival or heterarchical evolutionary pathways. But real, 'non-ideal' social institutions are results of conscious activities (social creativity) of people to no small degree, though people are frequently not capa-

ble to realize completely global sociopolitical outcomes of their deeds aimed at realization of personal goals. People create in the social sphere (as well as in other spheres) in correspondence with the value systems they adopt within their cultures in the process of socialization. They apprehend these norms as the most natural, the only true ones.

Hence, it is evident that the general culture type is intrinsically connected with its respective modal personality type. In their turn, the fundamental characteristics of modal personality types are transmitted by means of socialization practices which correspond to the value system generally accepted in a given society and can influence significantly its political evolution (see Irons 1979: 9–10, 33–35; Ionov 1992: 112–129; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a: 309–312) though scholars usually tend to stress the opposite influence, *i.e.* the influence of political systems on socialization processes and personality types.

The ecological factor is also important for determination of the pathway which this or that society follows (Bondarenko 1998b; 2000). Not only natural environment but the sociohistorical one as well should be included into the notion of 'ecology' in this case. The environment also contributes a lot to the defining of a society's evolutionary potential, creating limits to its advancement along the homoarchival or heterarchical axes. For example, there is no predestined inevitability of transition from the simple to complex society (Tainter 1990: 38; Lozny 2000) or from the early state to mature one (Claessen and van de Velde 1987: 20 *etc.*).

Let us discuss now the implications of the approach discussed above for the study of the state formation processes and 'politogenesis' in general. The tendency to see historical rules always and everywhere the same results in gross perversion of historical reality. For example, concurrent political processes are declared consecutive stages of the formation of the state. Besides, the features of already mature state are illegitimately attributed to its early forms and in consequence of this it becomes impossible to find any 'normal' early state practically anywhere.

The notion of 'politogenesis' was elaborated in the 1970s and 80s by Kubbel (*e.g.* 1988) who employed it to define the process of state formation. But it has become evident by today that processes of archaic societies' political evolution should not be reduced to the rise of the state exclusively because this is rather just one particular version of those processes. We suggest to use this term in order to denote the formation of any types of complex political

organization, which also looks more justifiable from the etymological point of view: in ancient Greece the word *politeia* meant the political order of any type, and not 'state'.

We believe that among the students of politogenesis one can observe a tendency to narrow the analysis to the study of the state formation process only. This entirely legitimate intention to restrict and define the study field still leads to the underestimation of the fact that for long periods of time the state formation process was inseparably linked with other evolutionary processes (e.g. processes of religious evolution), and this seems to hinder any really profound explanation of the state formation processes themselves. We believe that such explanations may be only achieved if the state formation processes are studied against background of all the other contemporary evolutionary processes.

It seems impossible to say that such an approach was always ignored (see e.g. Claessen and Skalkin 1978; Claessen 2000a [especially p. 2]). However, notwithstanding substantive achievements in the analysis of the general cultural context of state formation processes this problem still appears to be far from its real solution.

One of the causes of this situation can be defined as 'politocentrism'. *Volens-nolens* the state formation starts to be regarded as a central process of the evolution of medium complexity cultures not just because of initial definition of the research objective (which seems to be entirely legitimate); it starts to be regarded as an objectively central process, whereas this is not always true, because in many cases other processes (e.g. sociostructural or religious) could be more important (for details see Grinin 2001).

On the other hand, sure enough, there were not one but many models of politogenesis in the time of the transition from more simple societies to more complex (both socioculturally and technologically) ones. The resultant cultures often differ from the state, but it is incorrect to consider them prestate structures, because they could be well compared to the early state as regards their complexity, functions and causes of their formation.

Therefore, the evolutionary pathway within which the features of the state familiar to us are guessed retrospectively, is only one of the possible 'branches' of the politogenesis. But since later most alternative sociopolitical structures were destroyed by states, absorbed into states, or transformed into states<sup>7</sup>, it might be reasonable to recognize the 'state' branch of the politogenesis as 'general' and the alternative pathways as 'lateral'.

This, however, does not deny the fact that the alternative socio-political structures mentioned above cannot be adequately described as prestate formations, that they are quite comparable with early states by range of their functions and level of their structural complexity. Therefore, it seems possible to designate them as *state analogues*. The term '*state analogue*' underlines both typological and functional resemblance of such forms to the state and differences in structure. The introduction of this term makes it possible to describe the process of politogenesis more adequately.

In order to find solutions for a certain range of political anthropology problems it is necessary to consider the genesis of early state in the general context of socioevolutionary processes coeval with it. This could make it possible to appreciate more exactly the correlation between general evolution and state formation processes. For example, it seems evident that the early state formation is finally connected with general changes caused by the transition from the foraging to food production. This generally resulted in the growth of sociocultural complexity. This led to the appearance of the objective needs in new methods of organization of societies and new forms of contacts between them. But in different societies it was expressed in different ways. So, over long periods of time, the growth of sociostructural complexity, the exploitation of neighbors, development of commerce, property inequality and private ownership, growth of the role of religious cults and corporations etc. could serve as alternatives to purely administrative and political decisions of above-mentioned problems. And in these terms, the early state is only one of forms of new organization of the society and intersociety relations.

As a result we could suggest the following points for the future study of the socioevolutionary processes in medium complexity cultures:

- 1) interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the political aspects of the politogenesis and the other aspects (religious, sociostructural etc.);
- 2) causes of underdevelopment and fragmentary character of the administrative institutions in the early states;
- 3) causes of relative easiness of the transition from one pattern of growing sociocultural complexity to another;
- 4) determining of *sociopolitical* evolution models by historical-cultural and geographical conditions.

## NOTES

\* This study was supported by grants from the Russian Foundation for the Humanities (RGNF # 01-03-00332a) and from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR/RFFI # 01-06-80142).

<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that in fact this was frequently essentially Spencerian vision which was implied in such cases; that is the evolution was perceived as 'a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity' (Spencer 1972 [1862]: 71).

<sup>2</sup> The state is understood throughout as '...a sufficiently stable political unit characterized by the organization of power and administration which is separated from the population, and claims a supreme right to govern certain territory and population, i.e. to demand from it certain actions irrespective of its agreement or disagreement to do this, and possessing resources and forces to achieve these claims' (Grinin 1997: 20; see also Grinin 2000: 190).

<sup>3</sup> See also its fundamental criticism by Mann (1986), the most radically negative attitude to this scheme expressed in categories of social evolution 'trajectories alternatively' by Yoffee (1993), several collective works of recent years (Patterson and Gailey 1987; Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Kradin and Lynsha 1995; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a), proceedings of recent international conferences (Butovskaya *et al.* 1998; Bondareko and Sledzevski 2000).

<sup>4</sup> There is considerable difference in the general 'world-system' and civilizational approaches. While the former tends to develop the globalistic viewpoint on history, the latter emphasizes regional trends and tendencies of evolution. At the same moment, our employment of the 'world-system' approach in this part of our paper, in our opinion must not be apprehended as a contradiction within our overall 'civilizational' approach. First, there is an important aspect the respective approaches share: both of them stress supra-local (of more than one society) trends of changes in different spheres; and, second, pre-modern 'world-systems' as they are represented in the corresponding approach supporters' works (except A. Gunder Frank's version [e.g. Frank and Gills 1993]) look very similarly with what is called 'civilizations' within another approach [e.g. Abu-Lughod 1989; Sanderson 1995; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997]. Furthermore, it looks very much like that in the United States the general understanding of the necessity to study evolution and history on the supra-local level came through Wallerstein while in reality it was the civilizational approach (especially of the Danilevsky – Spengler – Toynbee 'brand') for which this principle became most fundamental much earlier.

<sup>5</sup> This appears to be especially relevant for those societies where extended families are dominated not by groups of brothers, but by individual 'fathers' (see e.g. Bromley 1981: 202–210).

<sup>6</sup> Note that among not only humans but other primates too, the role of kin relations is greater in homoarchically organized associations (Thierry 1990; Butovskaya and Feinberg 1993: 25–90; Butovskaya 1993; 2000; Butovskaya, Korotayev, and Kazankov 2000).

<sup>7</sup> However, such transformations could only happen when certain conditions were present. E.g. this could happen as a result of the influence of neighboring state systems.

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## Was the Chieftdom a Congelation of Ideas?

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**Robert L. Carneiro**

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Which of you by taking thought can  
add one cubit onto his stature?

Matthew 6:27

The pioneer American sociologist Lester F. Ward thought of the rise of the state as 'the result of an extraordinary exercise of the rational ... faculty', an achievement so exceptional that 'it must have been the emanation of a single brain or a few concerting minds...' (Ward 1883, 2: 224).

Nor was Ward's espousal of ideas as the paramount factors in political evolution unique for his time. The Enlightenment had substituted the mind of man for the will of God as the prime mover of human history, and those who followed made free use of ideas in accounting for the origin of a multitude of institutions. Let us look at some expressions of this view.

In his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, Auguste Comte (1830-1842, 1: 48) affirmed that 'it cannot be necessary to prove to anybody who reads this work that ideas govern and overthrow the world...' And Comte's English disciple, John Stuart Mill (1856, 2: 517), believed that 'the order of human progress in all respects will mainly depend on the order of progression in the intellectual convictions of mankind...' Ralph Waldo Emerson, who according to Leslie White (1949: 279) 'provided the intelligentsia of America

with the verbal reflexes called 'thought', declared that 'always the thought is prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind ... Every revolution was first a thought in one man's mind...' (Emerson n.d.a : 1-2).

The English historian Lord Acton, best known for his aphorism about power and corruption, gave one of the clearest expressions of the idealist position regarding the course of history:

...a strong materialistic tendency pervades a very popular portion of our literature. But what is really wanted, and what we ought to claim of our historians is the reverse of this. If history is to be understood as an intellectual, and not a natural process, it must be studied as the history of the mind.

And he went on to say:

Deeds as well as words are the sign of thought: and if we consider only external events, without following the course of ideas of which they are the expression and the result, ...we shall have but a lame notion of history... (quoted in Lally 1942: 216).<sup>1</sup>

With the rise of social science, however, a profound change began to occur in the way human history was interpreted. Material conditions began to be assigned a larger role in history. Nonetheless, several 19th-century anthropologists still clung to a belief in the dominant role of ideas. Adolf Bastian, according to Gumplovicz (1899: 38, 38-39), 'attributes all social phenomena to human thought... With him thoughts are always primary and deeds are an emanation from them...' In much the same terms, Colonel A. H. Pitt-Rivers (1906: 21) spoke of 'the science of culture in which the subjects treated are emanations from the human mind...'

Perhaps the strongest statement of 'ideological determinism' in anthropology is to be found in the writings of Sir James Frazer (1913: 168):

The more we study the inward workings of society and the progress of civilization, the more clearly shall we perceive how both are governed by the influence of thoughts which, springing up at first we know not how or whence in a few superior minds, gradually spread till they have leavened the whole inert lump... of mankind.

Nor did this viewpoint come to an end with the maturing of the social sciences. Indeed, it has its share of advocates among sociologists and anthropologists today. Talcott Parsons, perhaps the most influential sociologist of his generation, maintained that 'the basic

differentiating factors in socio-cultural evolution [are] much more "ideal" ... than they are "material"...' (Parsons 1972: 5). And again, '...I believe that, within the social system, the normative elements are more important for social change than the "material elements"...' (Parsons 1966: 113).

Robert Redfield (1955: 30) held a similar view:

The world of men is made up in [the] first place of ideas and ideals. If one studies the rise of urban communities out of more primitive communities, it is the change in the mental life, in norms and in aspirations, in personal character, too, that becomes the most significant aspect of the transformation.

It is the aim of this paper to look closely at just what might be meant when theorists assert the primacy of ideas in the evolution of culture. And in particular, I would like to assess how successful such an approach might be in accounting for the first major step in political evolution – the rise of the chiefdom.

### Cultural Materialist Interpretations

Alongside the view that ideas are the prime movers of culture, there grew up among the early evolutionists the opposite notion – that customs, beliefs, and institutions could better be explained by referring them to the material conditions which preceded and accompanied them.

To be sure, the two opposing views did not always occur separately and unalloyed. The same scholar might express a materialist view in one regard and an idealist view in another. Lewis H. Morgan, for example, looked toward essentially ideological determinants to account for social institutions, but to material ones to account for mechanical inventions. And a similar 'dualism' can be found in the writings of E. B. Tylor (see Carneiro [1973: 99–100, 102–104] for an extended discussion of this point).

Herbert Spencer, the third great 19th-century evolutionist, was more consistently in the materialist camp. Or at least, he was seldom found in the camp of the idealists. Thus, in rebutting Comte's contention that 'ideas govern and overthrow the world', Spencer (1891: 128) maintained that 'ideas do not govern and overthrow the world: the world is governed or overthrown by feelings, to which ideas serve only as guides'. And in discussing political evolution Spencer

(1890: 395) summed up his views of social causation by stating that, 'as with the genesis of simple political heads, so with the genesis of compound political heads, conditions and not intentions determine'.

The inclination to look for the determinants of social forms in environment, technology, subsistence, economics, and the like, has grown in anthropology, receiving support in the work of such men as Clark Wissler, Julian Steward, Leslie White, and Marvin Harris. In fact, those anthropologists who make a particular study of political evolution today, be they archeologists or ethnologists, generally adopt a cultural materialist approach to this problem.

The idealist position, though, as I have noted, is by no means dead. The last two decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the symbolic and ideological aspects of culture. All well and good. But it is one thing to elicit, record, and interpret the system of ideas of a people, and quite another to elevate these ideas to a position of causal primacy in accounting for the socio-political structure of their society. Yet there is still a marked tendency to do just this. The legacy of Robert Redfield is alive and well at the University of Chicago and elsewhere. Indeed, it may even be spreading. Accordingly, it may not be out of place to issue a warning: 'Idealitis' is not only contagious but virulent. Still, the situation is by no means hopeless. Where it is too late to prevent the affliction, it may not be too late to prescribe an antidote and effect a cure. At any rate, let us try.

The specific aim of this paper, as I have said, is to see how valid it is to account for the rise of the chieftdom in ideological terms. But since this problem is but part of a larger issue – the value of ideological explanations in accounting for cultural forms generally – it seems fitting to attack the larger question first before focusing on the smaller one.

### **The Nature Of The Problem**

Now, exactly what do theorists have in mind when they assert that ideas lie at the root of the chieftdom, or of any other institution? Is such an assertion any more than a statement of the obvious? After all, every human action that is not physically coerced is preceded by an idea. I pick up a stone and throw it at a tree because I first conceived the *idea* of doing so. Ideas are necessary antecedent states of mind preceding almost any human action. And if this is all there is to

'ideological determinism', it seems trivial indeed. **Of course** ideas must precede actions and create the volitions that are implemented by those actions. My pen will not move an inch unless I decide **I want it to**. Charlemagne would not have crowned himself Emperor of the Franks had he not conceived the idea of doing so. But what do we gain in explanatory power by restating something that is necessary and self-evident? Nothing. Indeed, we lose by it. We lose because we have created the **illusion** of an explanation where none exists.

Ideas may be necessary preconditions for any action, but just because they are the **proximate** cause does not make them the **ultimate** cause. Ideas cannot be accepted as **given**; they must be traced to their **source**. And their source is always the **matrix of conditions** out of which they arose, not the individual in whose mind their elements happened to combine. The thought may be father to the deed, but conditions are always father to the thought. Ideas have consequences, but they also have causes.

Thus in human behavior an Idea forms but an intermediate link, a middle term, between a Condition and an Outcome. Only if we truncate the chain of causation do we come away with the notion that the cause-and-effect relationship involved is:

Idea  $\longrightarrow$  Outcome,

instead of the fuller sequence:

Condition  $\longrightarrow$  Idea  $\longrightarrow$  Outcome.

But now, if ideas invariably result from a nexus of preceding conditions, are we not more likely to advance our quest for the origin of institutions if we abandon our fixation on ideas and apply ourselves to ferreting out these conditions?

To deny this is, in effect, to argue that the ideas that transform societies are ones that come from deep within the psyche of a few gifted individuals, arising there, pure and pristine, untainted by any contact with surrounding conditions. This view, of course, has had its advocates. It is implicit in the dictum of Ralph Waldo Emerson (n.d.b: 38) that 'an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man...' It is explicit in the statement by William James (1880: 458) that the great inventions of history, social as well as mechanical, 'were flashes of genius in an individual head, of which the outer environment showed no sign'.

We find this view again in James Breasted's attempt to attribute the origin of monotheism to the uncommon genius of one man, the pharaoh Ikhnaton:

Until Ikhnaton, the history of the world had been but the irresistible drift of tradition... Ikhnaton was the first individual in history. Consciously and deliberately, by intellectual process he gained his position, and then placed himself squarely in the face of tradition and swept it away (quoted in White 1949: 237).<sup>2</sup>

These statements clearly show that one of the dangers of an ideological interpretation of history is the ease with which it slides over into the quicksand of the Great Man Theory. And, at least since the time of Herbert Spencer, it has been recognized that there are insuperable difficulties with the view that the great cultural advances were due to Great Ideas generated by Great Men. The main difficulty with this view is, of course, How are Great Men to be accounted for? Why, for instance, was there such a dense clustering of geniuses in Athens from the 6th to the 4th centuries B. C. and virtually none thereafter?

Those who place their faith in the Great Man or the Genius freely admit that they find no way of accounting for him. John Fiske (quoted in Payne 1900: 142), for example, believed that 'the social philosopher must simply accept geniuses as data, just as Darwin accepts his spontaneous variations'. And Justin Kaplan (1983: 250), a Pulitzer Prize winning biographer, affirms that 'the Genius works in a dazzling darkness of his own which normal modes of explanation hardly penetrate'.

Earlier we saw that James Frazer attributed the progress of civilization to ideas issuing from 'a few superior minds'. In the same place, Frazer (1913: 168) went on to say:

The origin of such mental variations, with all their far-reaching train of social consequences, is just as obscure as is the origin of such physical variations on which, if biologists are right, depends the evolution of the species... Perhaps the same Unknown cause which determines the one set of variations gives rise to the other...

'Genius', then, is unfathomable and inexplicable. What a 'genius' creates is singular and unique, defying all laws and surpassing rational understanding.

Needless to say, this way of looking at the mainsprings of history is the antithesis of science. Indeed, it is anathema to science. The job

of science is to find the network of causes that renders everything intelligible. Science does not entertain the existence of phenomena that are inherently incomprehensible. If anything, it denies their existence. Or at least it makes every effort to unmask any phenomenon that poses as incomprehensible.

Science, therefore, rejects out of hand William James' contention that inventions are 'flashes of genius in an individual head, of which the outer environment showed no sign'. And it should be noted that in the very next issue of the journal that carried James' views on this subject there appeared a vigorous rejoinder to them by Grant Allen. Wrote Allen (1881: 381):

Dr. James's 'fortuitous' and 'spontaneous' variations, however carefully he may veil them, are merely long names for miracles... [T]he theory of spontaneous variations accidentally producing genius ... is nothing more than a deification of Caprice, conceived as an entity capable of initiating changes outside of the order of physical causation.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, when an idea is said to be unaccountable, the gauntlet is automatically thrown down to social science. And the challenge is to discover the circumstances out of which this 'unaccountable' idea arose; to reveal it as the determinate outcome of specifiable conditions.

Each of the great ideas of history – the domestication of plants, the smelting of ores, positional notation, gravitation, evolution, relativity, etc. – may indeed have coalesced in an individual mind. But in each case the idea was a **synthesis** of other ideas that already existed and were active in the culture. And without these preexisting, interacting elements, the synthesis would not have occurred. Could Newton have formulated the law of universal gravitation had he not had, as stepping stones, Galileo's law of falling bodies and the observations of planetary motions by Brahe, Kepler, and Copernicus?

Rather than bolts of lightning issuing from the minds of geniuses, inventions can more realistically be regarded as new conjunctions of cultural elements arising from the operation of the culture process. What we call the culture process has been described by Leslie White (1950: 76) as

a stream of interacting cultural elements – of instruments, beliefs, customs, etc. In this interactive process, each element impinges upon others and is in turn acted upon by them. The process is a competitive one: instruments, customs and beliefs may become obsolete and eliminated



from the stream. New elements are incorporated from time to time. New combinations and syntheses – inventions and discoveries – of cultural elements are continually being formed...

A 'genius' is someone favourably positioned in this process so that he is at the confluence or vortex of converging cultural streams, and can catch and ride the new eddies and currents being formed. He is the fortunate vehicle through which a new cultural synthesis takes place. As Edward Beesly (1861: 171) phrased it more than a century ago, 'Men of genius ... influence their age precisely in proportion as they comprehend and identify with its spirit'.

Culture traits, of course, do not act on each other independently of people and the thoughts that occur in their heads. The human brain is the receptacle into which the immaterial aspects of culture are poured. And it is not just a passive receptacle. It is a neurological mixmaster, in which ideas continually act and react on one another, giving rise on rare occasions to a new 'blend'. However, the properties of this new blend of cultural elements – the invention or discovery – depend, not on the properties of the blender, but on the ingredients that went into it.

The content of an invention thus depends on the cultural milieu in which the inventor finds himself. If this milieu does not provide a fit environment for its formation, the new idea will simply not emerge, the cultural synthesis will not take place. The idea of parliamentary government, for example, could scarcely have arisen in the mind of an Aurignacian reindeer hunter. Nor could an Australian aborigine have invented the calculus. Indeed, had Isaac Newton been born an Arunta he would not have invented it either. But someone else would have. Indeed, someone else **did**. Independently of Newton, and almost contemporaneously with him, Leibniz also invented the calculus. Are we forced to ascribe this occurrence to an extraordinary and fortuitous coincidence? Not at all. It was simply a matter of both Newton and Leibniz being immersed or positioned in the same maturing stream of mathematical ideas.

This and hundreds of other instances of simultaneous but independent inventions and discoveries show that when the time is ripe – when the culture process has advanced to the requisite point – an idea will occur to more than one mind at the same time. No better

proof than this is needed to show that great inventions are not inexplicable emanations from inscrutable minds. Rather, they are determinate outcomes of evolving and converging streams of culture.

Let us return for a moment to the Arunta. The reason the Arunta never invented the calculus was not because of any genetic deficiency. Nothing leads us to suppose that among them, as among any human population, there would not have been a sprinkling of individuals with the superior neurological equipment required to invent the calculus. Their failure to do so lay not in their genes but in their culture. Had their culture, and, especially, their mathematical tradition, been comparable to that of mid-17th-century England, some gifted Arunta might well have achieved this cultural synthesis.

The British sociologist Morris Ginsberg (1932: 74) made the same point decades ago:

It seems probable ... that the proportion of gifted men produced is fairly constant, while the expression or realization of their potentialities awaits and depends upon opportunities provided by the occasions of exceptional stir and exhilaration present in the epochs of progress.

Thus, Kroeber (1948: 339) noted, 'only a fraction of all the men congenitally equipped for genius ever actualize as such. Only a fraction are ever found out, or allowed the rank by history'.

Mark Twain (1961: 151–152) expressed this same idea in a characteristically striking way:

Thousands of geniuses live and die undiscovered – either by themselves or by others. But for the Civil War, Lincoln and Grant, Sherman and Sheridan would not have been discovered, nor have risen into notice. I have touched upon this matter in a small book... *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*. When Stormfield arrived in heaven he was eager to get a sight of those unrivaled and incomparable military geniuses, Caesar, Alexander and Napoleon, but was told by an old resident of heaven that they didn't amount to much there as military geniuses, that they ranked as obscure corporals only, by comparison with a certain colossal genius, a shoemaker by trade, who had lived and died unknown in a New England village and never seen a battle in all his earthly life. He had not been discovered while he was in the earth but heaven knew him as soon as he arrived there and lavished upon him the honors he would have received ... if the earth had known that he was the most prodigious military genius the planet had ever produced.<sup>4</sup>

Thoughts – ideas – are both **constrained** and **impelled**. Con-

**strained** because circumstances may greatly narrow what may be thought. (Could the most brilliant Yahgan who ever lived, shivering on the rocky coast of Tierra del Fuego, have possibly formulated the Second Law of Thermodynamics?) **Impelled** because once the right circumstances are present, certain ideas seem to spring up irresistibly, and individuals caught in the vortex of these swirling cultural elements are virtually **forced** to synthesize them. If anyone doubts this, listen to Herbert Spencer (1926, 2: 460):

Once having become possessed by the conception of Evolution in its comprehensive form, the desire to elaborate and set it forth was so strong that to have passed life in doing something else would, I think, have been almost intolerable.

What must we conclude, then, about those who affirm the primacy of ideas in begetting cultural change? If all they mean to say is that ideas are a necessary middle term between conditions and consequences, then their argument is obvious and trivial. But if they hold that culture advances only because uniquely gifted individuals are able to generate singular thoughts, quite independently of surrounding conditions, then their argument is demonstrably false.

### The Implementation Of Ideas

Even granting the importance of ideas, no matter how original and brilliant an idea might be, by itself it is not enough. It must be implanted in a seed bed which will allow it to germinate, burgeon, and flower. Who knows if some shambling Neanderthal 'genius', earnestly cogitating behind his sloping brow, may not, at some point in his life, have conceived the idea of a chieftdom? But it is one thing to conceive, quite another to effectuate. And the cultural conditions that prevailed during the Middle Paleolithic were simply not conducive to the rise of chieftdoms. This would have been just as true, moreover, had Caesar or Alexander or Napoleon – or even the New England cobbler! – been born a Neanderthal. Chieftdoms did not arise until suitable conditions were present. And when they were, chieftdoms sprang up in many parts of the world, like mushrooms after a summer storm. As Herbert Spencer put it, 'conditions and not intentions determine'.

## The Basis Of Chiefdoms

Of course, one needs to ask, what were the conditions that gave rise to the chiefdom? And, given these conditions, what 'ideas' were then generated in people's minds to provide the link between conditions and consequences?

As I have discussed elsewhere (Carneiro 1970, 1981) several factors led Neolithic villages to transcend local autonomy and create the multi-village political units we call chiefdoms. These conditions were, essentially, the presence of agriculture, the existence of environmental or social circumscription, population pressure, and warfare. Together, they formed the necessary and sufficient conditions that triggered the process. Almost irresistibly they led to the rise of chiefdoms, and then, in more limited areas, to the emergence of the state.

Now, into what sorts of ideas would these conditions have been translated as chiefdoms began to be formed? The ideas involved, it seems to me, would have been few and simple, and could have occurred to any ordinary mind. They amounted to little more than this:

1. Defeat neighboring villages by force of arms.
2. Incorporate them and their territory into your political unit.
3. Take prisoners of war and make them work for you as slaves.
4. Use your close supporters to administer conquered territory if local leaders prove rebellious.
5. Require your subjects to pay tribute to you periodically.
6. Require them also to provide fighting men in time of war.

These scant half-dozen ideas were quite enough to provide the intellectual armamentarium involved in creating a chiefdom. Could any half-dozen ideas be simpler? Could they not have occurred to anyone? Could they fail to occur to a village chief faced with the problem of insufficient land and covetous neighbors?

That these ideas were indeed simple and did occur to many a chief is amply demonstrated by the facts. Look around the world during late Neolithic and early Bronze Age times and you find **hundreds** of chiefdoms emerging. Moreover, in terms of their basic structure, they all looked pretty much alike. In fact, the more we learn about chiefdoms, the more we are struck by the similarities and regularities they possess. And multiple recurrences of the same phenomenon are, of course, the sworn enemy of 'strokes of genius',

or ideas of which 'the environment gave no outward sign'. Quite the contrary. Rather than subtle, abstruse, and profound, the ideas that underlay the chiefdom were easy and obvious. Thus chiefdoms themselves were the predictable and inescapable outcome of a specifiable set of circumstances. Whenever these conditions were present, chiefdoms arose. It was that simple.

The idea of a harsh, despotic, military basis for the chiefdom, which I proposed above, does not appeal to everyone. Many find it uncongenial and look instead for some theory that denies or abates the element of force. Such persons would find solace and comfort in passages which appear to contradict a martial and autocratic view of the nature of chiefdoms. Thus, they might eagerly seize upon John Adair's characterization of chiefly power among the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee at the time he visited them.

... they have no words to express despotic power, arbitrary kings, oppressed or obedient subjects. The power of their chiefs is an empty sound. They can only persuade or dissuade the people either by the force of good-nature and clear reasoning or colouring things so as to suit their prevailing passions (quoted in Peebles 1983: 185).

But as Christopher Peebles has made clear, the state of affairs Adair was describing was that of 1775, and not the aboriginal condition of southeastern chiefdoms. It was, in fact, the product of more than 200 years of disruption and deculturation, resulting directly or indirectly from European contact. During the 16th century, before this disruption had occurred, the chiefdoms of the Southeast were ruled by powerful and intimidating military leaders. Thus, an early Spanish chronicler known as the Gentleman of Elvas wrote as follows of Tastaluca, a paramount chief encountered by de Soto's expedition:

Before his dwelling, on a high place, was spread a mat for him, upon which two cushions were placed, one above the other, to which he went and sat down, his men placing themselves around, some way removed, so that an open circle was formed about him, the Indians of the highest rank being nearest his person. One of them shaded him from the sun with a circular umbrella... It formed the standard of the Chief, which he carried into battle. His appearance was full of dignity: he was tall of person, muscular, lean and symmetrical. He was the suzerain of many territories, and of numerous people, being equally feared by his vassals and neighboring nations (quoted in Peebles 1983: 184).

Only with the passage of time and the reversal of their fortunes were the once-powerful chiefdoms of the Southeast 'transformed into essentially egalitarian societies made up of independent communities knit together into loose confederacies' (Peebles 1983: 185).

### **Ideology As a Validation Of Reality**

As Karl Hutterer has noted, 'power is validated by its exercise'. That is to say, the most effective way to make power recognized and accepted is to wield it. Thus an Inca emperor, finding himself with 20,000 men mobilized for work and nothing for them to do, had them move a hill from one place to another, and when they were finished, had them move it back. More than all the dazzling emblems and elaborate rituals of his office, it was acts of this kind that made the Inca respected and obeyed.

Is there no way, then, to rescue ideology from the scrap heap of causal explanations to which we appear to have consigned it? Perhaps there is. But if ideology can be said to have served a significant function in the life of a chiefdom, it was more in its maintenance than in its creation. Ideology can be seen to play a role in proclaiming and sustaining the authority of a paramount chief after that authority has first been established by force of arms.

Once a chiefdom is in place, its leader still faces a severe challenge: to make loyal, tax-paying subjects out of people who, shortly before, were his sworn enemies. Created by naked force though it was, a chiefdom must at some point begin to loosen the reins. The iron fist begins to don a velvet glove. Efforts are made to soften oppression, or at least to justify it. In time, a harsh *fait accompli* is made to seem the natural and proper order of things. And achieving this transformation entails the creation of an **ideology** – a nexus of myths, symbols, and rituals, of rationalizations and exhortations, all meant to make tolerable, and perhaps even pleasant, that which must be borne.

Although an ideology may grow up slowly and fitfully, it may eventually become an elaborate, coherent, and compelling system of beliefs and practices. And if promoted effectively, this ideology may in time penetrate so deeply into a chiefdom's traditions as to obscure and belie its true roots. The ruthless conquests of a military despot may, in a few generations, become transmogrified into a peaceful and

benevolent joining of willing peoples by an ancient leader who, if not a god himself, was at least guided by a divine hand.

And if later generations of subjects thus come to be misled about how the chieftdom really arose, is it any wonder that anthropologists, wrestling with this same problem centuries later have been misled too?

## The Two Aspects Of Ideology

Ideology has a double edge. It is persuasive and it is coercive. Durkheim was right when he said that rules of conduct 'are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him...' (quoted in White 1949: 146). Implanted in an individual, cultural norms may incite a person to act, no less than the point of a sword.

But culture operates most effectively the less coercive it appears. People follow rules more willingly the more these rules seem, not mandates from above, but impulses from within. One complies most readily when spoken to by that wee small voice of conscience, unaware that, as Shakespeare shrewdly saw, 'Policy sits above conscience' (*Timon of Athens*, Act III, Scene 2).

Erich Fromm put the matter very neatly when he said, 'a society works best when people want to do what they have to do'. Paramount chiefs, therefore, see to it that ideas of duty, allegiance, and fealty are instilled in their subjects. In this way, as I have said, onerous and even odious tasks, like obeying restrictive laws, paying taxes, and risking life and limb in time of war, are made bearable. Indeed, if sufficiently imbued with societal goals, subjects come to feel that fulfilling these demands is their patriotic duty. And when devotion to duty is conspicuously rewarded with honor, glory, fame, and rank, compliance with the desires and interests of the chief becomes even more assured. Let me present just one example of this.

Ordinarily, paying taxes is regarded as a cheerless burden, but Fijian chiefs had found a way to make it a festive occasion:

Tax-paying in Fiji, unlike that in Britain, - wrote the missionary Thomas Williams, - is associated with all that the people love. The time of its taking place is a high day; a day for the best attire, the pleasantest looks, and the kindest words; a day for display: whales' teeth and cowrie necklaces, orange-cowrie and pearl-shell breast ornaments, the scarlet

frontlet, the newest style of neck-band, ...the most graceful turban, powder of jet black and rouge of the deepest red, are all in requisition on that festive day. The **coiffure** that has been in process for months is now shown in perfection; the beard, long nursed, receives extra attention and the finishing touch; the body is anointed with the most fragrant oil, and decorated with the gayest flowers and most elegant vines...

The Fijian carries his tribute with every demonstration of joyful excitement, of which all the tribe concerned fully partake. Crowds of spectators are assembled, and the king and his suite are there to receive the impost, which is paid in with a song and a dance, and received with smiles and applause. From this scene the tax-payers retire to partake of a feast provided by their king.

And then Williams adds: 'Surely the policy that can thus make the paying of taxes "a thing of joy", is not contemptible' (Williams 1870: 31-32).

So again we see that the heavier the overlay of rituals, the likelier a chief's subjects are to act, as they believe, for the greater good of society. And of course this eases the problems of the chief in his continuing efforts to keep his chiefdom firmly under control.

Now, when political obligations, lightened in this way, are in addition infused with religious meanings and sanctions, the silken cord of ideological coercion is drawn still tighter. When the desire of the chief becomes also the will of the gods, and compliance with it is rewarded with promises of a glorious hereafter, or other supernatural recompense, who would willingly demur? And to stiffen the spine of those who might, there is often added the threat of swift and terrible reprisals by the gods if they should fail.

As I suggested earlier, so overlaid with religious trappings may a chiefdom (or a state) become as to give the false impression that, from its inception, it was a peaceful theocracy. The actual scenario, though, might have been as follows. A chiefdom, arisen by conquest, might eventually push its boundaries to their natural geographic limits, after which warfare might cease, or at least greatly diminish for lack of enemies to fight. Thus shorn of his original military role, the paramount chief might then begin to arrogate onto himself more and more religious attributes and functions, seeking by this means to maintain his power. In time, a chiefdom might take on all the trappings of a peaceful theocracy, and someone observing it at this stage might easily project this absence of war, coupled with the elaborate



religious role of the chief, back to the chieftdom's very beginnings. Yet, if we knew the early history of the chieftdom, we would clearly discern its martial origins. If we must paint the primal chieftdom in bold colors, then, it is more accurate to depict it as a secular military despotism than as a peaceful theocracy.

One word of caution. An increase in ritual, myth, and symbol should not always be taken to indicate a corresponding increase in political control. Quite the opposite may be true. In an interesting paper, Martin R. Doornbos has called attention to the fact that an efflorescence of ceremonialism in a chieftdom or state may actually mask its decline and impending dissolution. Based on his study of the Kingdom of Ankole in East Africa, Doornbos (1985: 25, 34) writes:

...even if a political institution is increasingly decorated with gilt and glitter, its actual functions may, nevertheless, be subject to decay. And when most references to an institution begin to be concerned with its pomp and circumstance and no longer with any effective ... role it might have had, then it is not unreasonable to suspect that it has lost the essence of its former role and position... [A]n inverse correlation is again suggested, namely, the greater the ceremonialization of a particular role, the weaker the actual 'command' powers of its incumbents.

Before a chieftdom or state reaches its senescence, though, its ideology may well reflect something of its particular nature and structure. Thus, even if we know only the ideology of a polity, we may be able to infer a number of other things about it. Consider religious iconography, which is often the material embodiment, in art, of certain ideas important to a society. And take, for example, Chavín, whose total culture is very imperfectly known. Of the little we know of Chavín, much of it comes from its ideology, as reflected in its religious iconography. And while others may read it differently, to me this art denotes a strong military basis to Chavín society. And if a strong and far-reaching religious superstructure – a church – characterized Chavín, it was a church militant, acting in the service of a militant state. Otherwise, why should the dominant symbols of Chavín religion have been such creatures as jaguars and eagles instead of, say, guinea pigs and butterflies?

### **Similarities Of Structure And Their Meaning**

The more we look at chieftdoms around the world – in the Southeast,

the Circum-Caribbean, west, central, and east Africa, Polynesia, etc. – the more we are struck by the similarities in their structure. And this is true not only of their gross anatomy, but of their fine details as well. Thus we find many traits occurring in chiefdom after chiefdom: the chief having the power of life and death over his subjects, his indulgence in polygyny, his being carried on a litter, the making of obeisances to him, burial in a special grave along with his wives and retainers, etc., etc. And, as we noted before, the more parallels we find in the organization of chiefdoms, the more they can be seen as a normal, determinate, predictable, and even inevitable stage of social evolution, and conversely, the less they will seem the result of a singular and fortuitous concurrence of uncommon ideas.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is now time to summarize. If ideas necessarily precede action, then ideas must indeed be the precursors of all that was involved in the rise of the chiefdom. However, ideas are not uncaused causes. They do not spring from indeterminate and unfathomable sources. Nor are the ideas underlying a chiefdom so abstruse and profound as to have required a prodigious intelligence to formulate them. The conditions that brought the chiefdom into being were simple, widespread, and recurring. And in explaining the rise of the chiefdom we are likelier to succeed if we look carefully at these conditions than if we try to penetrate the minds of those individuals who were shaped by them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Any number of expressions of this view can be cited. Thus, the American cleric Francis H. Johnson (1884: 638) thought it an 'incontestable fact that mind is the sole originating cause of which we have any knowledge...', adding that 'in our experience of real causation the process is uniformly not from matter to mind, but from mind to matter'. And the distinguished British historian John B. Bury (1930: 46), spoke of 'history, in which thought is the characteristic and guiding force...'

<sup>2</sup> A reliance on 'geniuses' as the prime movers of culture finds occasional expression in anthropology as well. Thus, Robert H. Lowie (1940: 25) wrote:

The tremendous importance of farming, then, lies not in what it did for mankind when first introduced but what it was capable of achieving after being itself greatly improved. The expert farmers of Peru could maintain a population of possibly three million. This meant a chance for more geniuses to be born ...

For other instances of anthropologists invoking 'genius' to account for cultural advance see Wissler (1923: 331), Childe (1935: 5-6), Swanton (1930: 368), Boas (1945: 76), and Kenyon (1959: 40).

<sup>3</sup> Even before William James proclaimed it so unabashedly, J. F. McLennan (1876: 231) was familiar with this mode of thought and heaped scorn upon it, calling it, in Dugald Stewart's words, 'the indolent philosophy which refers to a miracle whatever appearance both in the natural and moral worlds it is unable to explain'. (For leading me to this passage I am indebted to George W. Stocking, Jr. [1987: 168]).

<sup>4</sup> Another aspect of the question of genius, but one which receives scant attention, is that of a person with little more than average intelligence who, because he is thrust by circumstances into a particularly favorable position, is able to make a great cultural synthesis. In my opinion, Charles Darwin lacked the intellectual acuity of some of his contemporaries, such as Herbert Spencer or Thomas Henry Huxley. Yet, by applying the intelligence he had to a major problem, and doing so with extraordinary tenacity, he was able to achieve what was probably the most far-reaching intellectual triumph of all time.

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## Was the State Inevitable?

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This article poses the problem to what extent the emergence of the state was inevitable.

According to some anthropologists the development of the (early) state was the inevitable outcome of the evolution of political organization. The sequences developed by scholars such as Service (1971), and Fried (1967) place the state at the highest level of development, and suggest, moreover, that under normal circumstances the state level would be reached. This orthodox view has come recently heavily under fire. Practically all contributors to the collection volume *Beyond Chiefdoms. Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Keech McIntosh, ed., 1999) reject this unilinear view, and state that numerous developments can be pointed out that produced complex societies, but not the state (for similar views: Crumley 1987, 1995). Instead of the development of hierarchy, these authors point to the development of heterarchy, i.e., a society in which power and leadership is divided over several groups or persons, or, as Crumley (1995: 30), formulated: 'a system in which elements are unranked relative to one another or ranked in a variety of ways depending on conditions'. And indeed, the ethnographical record shows many cases of heterarchy – but also of states. In the recent volume *Alternatives of Social Evolution* (Kradin, Korotayev, Bondarenko, De Munck and Wason, eds., 2000), several of the contributors describe evolutionary developments that led to heterarchical forms of sociopolitical organization – though other contributors to the volume do not neglect state formation.

According to other anthropologists the development of the state might even have been prevented, if only people had been more aware of its danger. Society could have resisted the formation of the state. The work of Pierre Clastres, *La Société contre l'Etat* (1974), might have been a good example, but its promising title notwithstanding, it does not describe efforts to prevent the formation of the state, but the efforts of some Brazilian tribes to prevent hierarchization – which is not the same. The Brazilian efforts thus did not prevent the development of the state.

From the foregoing it follows that, in the evolution of a great variety of more or less complex types of sociopolitical organization, at least in some cases an early state organization emerged. The state as type of organization appeared to be most viable, and nowadays it is all over the world the dominant form of polity. This leads to the question if, and if so, to what extent, state formation was inevitable. I will first define the two central terms of this question. 'Inevitability' expresses the fact that, given specified circumstances, the emergence of a certain phenomenon cannot be prevented; it is sure that it will happen or appear. The definition of 'state' is less easy to formulate. This may seem strange, for there are numerous definitions of 'state'. The problem with most definitions is that they are based on ideological considerations. Already in *The Early State* (1978) Peter Skalnik and I pointed to the existence of a veritable watershed between the definitions formulated by people who thought the state was wrong and despicable, and those formulated by people who considered the emergence of the state a major achievement of cultural evolution, opening up most promising perspectives to humankind. I will try to evade the pitfalls of both approaches, and formulate a relatively ideology-free definition of the state. In order to do so I will first state some facts about the state. The state is a phenomenon which first appeared only several thousand years ago. The state, being a product of social relations must not be reified, personified or sacralized. It is a specific kind of social organization, expressing a specific type of social order in a society. It gives expression to the existing social, economical and political relations in that society and to ideas pertaining to power, authority, force, justice, and property (Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 4). Or, as Friedrich Engels put it more than hundred years ago:

The state has not existed from all eternity... At a definite stage of



economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage. (1884/1972: 232).

According to Patricia Shifferd (1987: 47 ff.) the course of state formation did not run smooth, and caused problems for many of its inhabitants:

The emergence of the state, whatever its benefits, carried economic and political costs for most of the individuals and corporate groups in the affected societies. The enlarged coercive, expropriative, and imperialistic potential of the state, even the very early one, was paid for by some loss of independence and discretionary action by the majority of the people.

She continues – and I think the following statements of hers are most important for our discussion –

...continued centralization, although clearly observable taking human cultural evolution as a whole, is certainly not inevitable for individual cases. In fact such continued centralization was the least common outcome in the sample at hand.

Or, stated in a different way:

The probabilities of all the necessary conditions being present in any single case are doubtless quite small.

From these statements we may conclude that:

- the development of the state is only one of many developments, and
- only when certain, 'necessary conditions' are present, the state will emerge.

I will limit my analysis to the emergence of early states, for all later types of states developed out of earlier forms. As a definition of the early state I take (with some minor modifications) the one formulated in *The Early State* (1978: 640):

The early state is a three-tier (national, regional, local level) socio-political organization for the regulation of social relations in a complex stratified society, divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent social classes – viz., the rulers and the ruled – whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and the obligation to pay tax of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle.

With regard to this definition some comments are necessary. In the first place the reciprocal obligations between rulers and ruled have, of course, an asymmetrical character; put in a simple way, it is

an exchange of goods for 'Good'. The existence of a common ideology does not necessarily mean that rulers and ruled have an identical ideology. The views on Christianity of elite and commoners differed greatly in medieval West Europe – and yet, they shared the same Christian doctrine (Duby 1985). As long as there exists a certain overlap between the views of both categories, small differences in ideology will not endanger the legitimacy – and thus the stability – of the (early) state. Secondly, a sound economy does contribute greatly to the acceptance of the rulers; as long as there is available sufficient food and goods for all, the legitimacy of the government will be easily accepted and maintained, as Donald Kurtz (1984) points out. There were, of course, early states where the economic situation was poor; only by applying brute force the elite could exact the food and goods they needed to live in luxury (e.g., Cohen 1991 on pre colonial Bornu; Van Bakel 1991 on Hawai'i). A precarious economic situation seems to have been more the exception than the rule, however, for – speaking generally – some prosperity is needed to make it possible for a state to function (Claessen 2000). Thirdly, prosperity or no prosperity, there is always found great inequality in (early) states. Some people, the happy few, are rich and powerful and all others, the great majority, are poor and powerless. This is the situation that made Aidan Southall ask 'how people succeeded in deceiving themselves into accepting the rise of the state round and above them, until the point was reached when they no longer had any choice and had lost the power to reject it' (1991: 78; for a similar view: Paynter 1989).

The answer to this question is that such a choice never was presented to people. The state developed gradually out of earlier forms of organization, such as chiefdoms, large big-man conglomerates, or *poleis*, where existed already social inequality, the obligation to pay tax, the obligation to work for the leaders, and the necessity to obey rules and regulations (for examples of chiefdoms: Earle 1991, 1997; Carneiro 1981; Kirch 1984; for big-men systems: Vansina 1991, 1999; for the Greek *polis*: Van der Vliet 1987, 2000). The legitimization of leadership, whether in chiefdoms, *poleis*, or in states, was not a matter of deceit on the side of the rulers, as Joyce and Winter (1996: 37) suggested, but a matter of shared beliefs and convictions. It was common in those days to believe that some people had better relations with the gods, spirits, or ancestors than others, and because

of this they were expected to be better placed to act as intermediaries between the people and the supernatural forces than whoever else in that society. This type of convictions lay at the bottom of their higher social and political status (Claessen and Oosten 1996; Thomas 1990: 26–33; Claessen 2000).

In the discussion so far several elements came to the fore that were important in the development and acceptance of states. Most important seems to be the fact that already long before the state came into being people lived in well-organized societies, and were accustomed to leadership, rules, taxes, obligations, etcetera. The development of a state out of such a form of organization depended upon the emergence of some 'necessary conditions' (as Shifferd has called them). In some cases the 'necessary conditions' emerged in but a short period of time, and consequently the formation of the state took only a short time. This holds for example for the state of the Betsileo in Madagascar (Kottak 1980; Claessen 2000).

The Betsileo lived at the east side of the island, where they cultivated rice in the coastal plains on irrigated terraces. Their existence was threatened when in the early seventeenth century slave hunters tried to capture people. To protect themselves against this danger they erected hill top forts, and defended themselves from there against the slave hunters. In this way they were able to stay near their rice fields. Because of the relative safety of the hill forts great numbers of people sought refuge there. This led to population pressure in the hill top settlements, and strong administrative measures became necessary to maintain order within the forts. This demanded stronger leadership than was customary. In Betsileo society there existed already clan leaders, endowed with some form of sacred legitimacy. From their midst persons came to the fore who took the necessary measures to organize social life in the forts. As clan leaders they possessed already a sacred status, and, together with their increasing powers, they soon became considered to possess this quality in a stronger measure than the other leaders, and they were elevated above all others. The growing complexity of the society made it inevitable to develop mechanisms to ensure that rules and regulations were carried out – if necessary by force. In this way a reasonable degree of order in the overcrowded forts was reached and safety as well as a sufficient flow of food and goods was ensured.

The case of the Betsileo presents several clues to the identifica-

tion of the 'necessary conditions' under which state formation occurs, such as an imminent danger, the necessity to organize some defense, some collective building activities, the necessity to keep order in densely populated settlements, the need to produce food supplies; in the course of these activities the need for more developed forms of legitimized leadership came to the fore.

In order to find additional data on the 'necessary conditions' a survey of the evolution of some Polynesian societies will be presented now. These island societies have a more or less similar economic and ideological background. For our goal it is important to realize that from its very beginning, Polynesian sociopolitical organization had a hierarchical basis (Kirch and Green 2001). There are in Polynesia small scale local societies, as well as large, well-organized chiefdoms and early states (Kirch 1984; Van Bakel 1989; Claessen 2000). The main incentives behind the socio-political developments are on the one hand the size of the island and the percentage of arable land, and the number of people on the other. The little atolls, where only a few hundred people did live on a few square kilometers, are characterized by small scale societies, where sacred headmen exercise modest forms of leadership. In such face-to-face communities, with only limited resources are but few tasks for leaders. In case of communal fishing parties they give instructions, and in ceremonial matters they had a say (see: Alkire 1977; Mason 1968; Huntsman and Hooper 1996). On larger islands, such as the Marquesas, conditions for the development of more complex forms of leadership were favorable. Here the relatively large population put too great a pressure on the available resources. Therefore the sacred chiefs were no longer able to fulfill the expectations of their people that they would procure fertility and well-being, and the people lost their faith in them; the chiefs lost their ideologically based legitimacy, and soon after that the political system collapsed; sacred chiefs made place for warring big men (Van Bakel 1989; Thomas 1990; Kirch 1991). On the large, fertile islands of the Samoa group the political organization remained embryonic. The actual power lay with the village community, and the village leaders had to consult all family heads before any decision could be taken. If decisions were not acceptable to some villagers, they could go away, and settle into another village. This unique situation is connected with the low density of population here (Van Bakel 1989, 1991; Bargatzky 1987; for a different view: Tcherkézoff

1997). In the large islands of Tahiti, Tonga and Hawai'i early states developed. In these islands a large population, concentrated mainly in the coastal plains, and a rich economy made the development of a large ruling class possible – though it seems that on the Hawai'ian Islands the limits of the resources were reached, for irrigation works and artificial fishponds were needed to feed the population (for Tahiti: Claessen 2000; for Tonga: Douaire-Marsaudon; for Hawai'i: Tuggle 1979; Sahlins 1992 presents a less pessimistic view, but describes also irrigation works and fishponds).

The combined data on the Betsileo and Polynesia enable us to formulate in a more general way the 'necessary conditions' under which (early) states emerge (see also Claessen and Oosten 1996: 5):

– **There must be a sufficient number of people to form a complex stratified society.** The necessary number of administrators, servants, courtiers, priests, soldiers, agriculturalists, traders and so on, can only be found in a population running into the thousands. Even the smallest early states on Tahiti numbered at least some 5,000 people. Such large numbers of people, living together in one society has a number of consequences, the most important of which is the need of more developed forms of leadership. An explanation of this need is given by Gregory Johnson. First he demonstrated that in larger groups a greater mass of information becomes available; few people are able to manage such a stream of data. This promotes the position of those who possess this quality (1978). He then explains that when a large number of people live together in one society, some form of decision-making is needed. If no persons come to the fore who are entitled – or capable, or sufficiently strong – to take decisions, the large group will fall apart (Johnson 1981). The atoll societies of Oceania clearly were too small to need a strongly developed form of leadership. The Samoan case shows that as long there is a possibility to 'escape' strong leaders, such a leadership will not develop. On the large islands, such as Tahiti, Tongatapu, or Hawai'i complex sociopolitical organizations emerged, societies that qualify as early states.

– **The society must control a specified territory.** The territory is in first instance the place where the society lives. In the long run such a territory can be no longer sufficient for the maintenance of the population. In the Marquesas Islands pressure on the means of subsistence, made worse by devastating wars, led to hunger and misery,

and the chiefly organization collapsed. Elsewhere, as was the case with the Aztecs (Hicks 1986) or the Vikings (Sawyer 1982) conquest, plunder, or trade were the means to amend for its shortcomings. In both cases the society in question maintained its original territory.

– **There must be a productive system yielding a surplus to maintain the specialists and the privileged categories.** The specialists may be political, religious and administrative functionaries, but also craftsmen, traders, servants, etc. The collection of the surplus may be in the form of taxation, tribute, or even plunder (see Hicks 1986; Claessen and Van de Velde 1991: 11–12; Cohen 1991). As long as sufficient means are collected to ‘pay’ the chiefs, the kings, the priests, the servants, and eventually the needy, a complex socio-political structure can be maintained, even enlarged. A poor economy simply prevents the maintenance, or even the emergence of such a type of society; a more complex political organization eventually will collapse by declining income, as was the case on Easter Island (Claessen 2000).

Where societies occupy a large territory, but people live in small village communities, having no more than a simple subsistence economy, and but limited contacts, a stratified sociopolitical organization usually does not emerge. There is simply no need for chiefs or administrators. Households care for themselves, and there are but few overarching institutions (sodalities, as Service 1971 called them). Good examples of such societies are the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940), or the Plateau Tonga (Colson 1968). The implication of this is that there must be **tasks** for leaders will it be possible for them to develop positions of power and status. In this respect Johnson and Earle (1987) speak of risk management, and see that as one of the crucial tasks of sociopolitical leaders. This does not contradict Johnson's theories on the development of leadership, but rather adds to it. Such tasks will develop, for example, when economic activities demand co-operation on a more permanent scale, when religious convictions ask for temples or sanctuaries, or when a growing need for water demands irrigation works. I am aware that in several places irrigation works were constructed without the intervention of chiefs or kings – e.g., in the island of Bali it were the village communities that constructed irrigation works (Grader 1984; Geertz 1980) – yet, generally speaking, management is a great impetus for the develop-

ment of leadership, and many times the servant of the community grew into its ruler (Engels 1960: 219; Wittfogel 1957).

– **There must exist an ideology, which explains and justifies a hierarchical administrative organization and socio-political inequality.** The existence, or the development of such an ideology makes it possible for the less fortunate to understand and to accept their modest position. If such an ideology does not exist or emerges, the formation of a state becomes difficult, or even outright impossible (cf. Clastres 1974; Earle 1997), and other types of sociopolitical organization will emerge. Many of such societies can be characterized by the term heterarchy – mentioned already at the beginning of this article. Such heterarchical societies can be quite complex, and they are found all over the world. Asiatic societies, such as the Kachin, belong to this category (Friedman 1979; Hagesteijn 1989), as well as the Northwest Coast Indians (Suttles 1990), and many African societies (Keech McIntosh, ed. 1999). The African Mbundu are a good case in point. Here a large population lived under favorable economic conditions, and there were several efforts to organize overarching religious and/or sociopolitical structures. None of these efforts succeeded, however; the egalitarian ideology of the population was too strong to accept the domination by a centralized administrative apparatus (Miller 1976).

The development of a convincing form of legitimation is crucial for the establishing of more complex forms of leadership. The concept of legitimacy was introduced into the social sciences by Max Weber (1964: 24 ff.), who stated that legitimacy of a leader was based in the first place on the beliefs of his people. If a ruler acted conform to the beliefs of his people he acted in a legitimate way. Though also to Beetham (1991: 11) the sharing of norms and values by rulers and ruled is a necessary condition, he thinks that also the legal validity of the acquisition and exercise of power has to be established. This seems a valuable addition to Weber's views (see also Cohen 1988).

The ideological legitimation appears to have a strong materialistic component, however. As stated above, Kurtz (1984) refers to the obligation of a government to fulfill the economic needs of the people; as long as that is done, people will obey the demands and rules the ruler issues. Stated differently: the people has obligations toward its ruler, but the ruler also has obligations towards his people.

This relation is a reciprocal one: we, the people, work for the government, the government has to take care of us. In Polynesia and Micronesia the legitimizing ideology is based on the belief that the founder of the group – the oldest descendant of the oldest line – is a direct descendant of one of the gods. This birth endows the founding father with sacred qualities. These qualities pass over to the eldest son, and his eldest son, and so on. Because of this these descendants were rightfully the leaders of the group. Only they could approach their divine forefathers directly, and procure fertility and well-being for all. In reciprocity the commoners gave food, labor, and women to the leaders, and obeyed their commands (Thomas 1990).

In many African cases leadership was connected with the idea of 'the first'. It was believed that the person who was the first to open the earth (for agriculture) met with the earth spirits, with whom he concluded a kind of contract, and in exchange for certain rituals, he could procure fertility for women, cattle, and land. According to the myths this earth priest lost in several regions his political prerogatives to the 'hunter', a person assumed to have come from abroad and who is connected with the distribution of meat. By marrying the daughter of the earth priest the hunter and his descendants became sacred political leaders (Claessen and Oosten 1996; Muller 1999; Keech McIntosh ed., 1999).

The Southeast Asian Kachin believed that a man who produced more food than others, and because of this could hand out more than others, had good connections with the gods, the spirits or the forefathers. When his good fortune remained, people started to give the man small presents, in return for his blessings. In this way – and when his agricultural luck continued – he could become a sacred leader and the gifts became obligatory; Friedman (1979) even connects the development of the Asiatic mode of production with this type of structure. Hagesteijn (1989) describes the further development of such polities into instable early states.

The occurrence of these four conditions at the same time and at the same place is already quite exceptional (see Shifferd 1987), but is in itself not yet sufficient for the development of a state; there is also needed some cause that triggers the developments. **This cause may be considered as the fifth necessary condition.** In the case of the Betsileo this cause was the arrival of slave hunters. Not willing to be captured, but at the same time not willing to leave the rice



terraces, the Betsileo decided to withdraw to nearby hill forts, and defend themselves. This 'first step' had the serious – but **not intended** – consequence that an early state emerged here. In other places the necessity to develop irrigation works, or the need to protect long-distance trade demanded stronger leadership. This all was stated already in *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 624–625):

...the development into statehood, in all cases, was triggered off by some action or event which took place a long time before, and was *not directed especially* towards this goal. The other obvious characteristic of the development to statehood is that it always shows something of a snowball effect: once it comes into motion, it grows faster and faster.

In view of the data presented, it is clear that a number of factors should be present, and some influence – internal or external – that triggered the developments. This influence could be a danger, as happened with the Betsileo, a shortage of food and goods, as was the case with the Aztecs, or the introduction of new ideas and beliefs that were crucial in the development of South East Asian early states (Hagesteijn 1989). It should be realized, however, that this combination not always resulted in more complex socio-political organizations; this happened only when the factors reinforced each other; when a positive feedback occurred. When the strength of the factors varied greatly there is every reason to believe that some other type of sociopolitical organization would emerge – a big-man structure, a heterarchy. If, what must have happened many times, the factors contradicted or hampered each other, stagnation was the case (negative feedback), and eventually an early state did not emerge. In the Complex Interaction Model (Claessen and Van de Velde 1985; 1987) we formulated the interrelation of the crucial formative factors – the societal format (i.e., the territory and the number of people), the ideology, and the dominance of the economy. A mutual, reciprocal influencing of each other causes changes in the factors (or groups of factors), creating the conditions under which more complex socio-political organizations emerge. Once it has been established, the sociopolitical organization becomes the fourth factor in the model, which in its turn influences the other three and acts as a co-determinant – provided, of course, that no negative feedback prevents or postpones this.

An analysis of historic cases makes clear that in many cases the

development of a state was a process of long duration. During the process progress and stagnation could both occur; yet, in the end the state was a fact. The checkered history of the Frankish kingdom is a good example of such a prolonged development. The state of the Capetians emerged only after an eventful history of seven centuries. A history that began with Clovis, who started the process of state formation in the fifth century with the creation of an emergent early state, and ended with Philippe II August, who in the 12th century rounded off the building of a mature state (Claessen 1985). The history of the Betsileo demonstrates, however, that the formation of an early state can be a matter of some fifty years only (cf. Kottak 1980). And, there are many cases where, even though most of the necessary conditions were present, a state never emerged at all, as the history of the Mbundu of Angola shows (Miller 1976; cf. also Shiferd 1987).

It is in this context that the answer to our question should be sought. Only when a number of specified conditions are present at the same time in the same society, and when some triggering accident occurs, the development of an early state will take place, provided that a positive feedback between the 'necessary conditions' occurs. It is in such cases only that the emergence of an early state was inevitable.

This is not the end of the story. Nowadays everywhere the modern, highly developed state is the dominant form of government, and alternative models of sociopolitical organization are tolerated only as a kind of districts or provinces in modern states. From its very beginning was the state a stronger type of organization than all others; for the surrounding polities there were not many alternatives. They could try to imitate the powerful organization – peer polity interaction (Renfrew and Cherry 1986) – and try to maintain their independence or they would become subdued or colonized after some time. In that respect one cannot but conclude that in the end the state has been inevitable. And, even this seems not to be the end of evolution. We do not know what the consequences of growing globalization and localization will be; prediction in the social sciences is rather hazardous. That, however, the state in the form we know it now will have had its longest time seems not improbable – it is perhaps even inevitable (Kloos 1995).

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# Geopolitics in an Era of Internationalism

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States one often hears the statement that we have entered a new historical era. The problem is that a new world era has been announced quite often. Since the turn of the 1990s, there has been a buzz of enthusiasm for the idea that a new world order is emerging. Among social scientists it is argued that we need a new International Relations theory to replace the neorealism which flourished in the era of confrontational power blocs. Is it possible that we are in a new period where the only use of force is international coalitions taking action against 'rogue states', 'international outlaws', and terrorist organizations? Is this the beginning of a new form of International Relations, based not upon *Realpolitik* but upon a world regime which uses legitimate force in support of universal human rights? And if we are in a new historical era, do we not need a new theory? Does a new era mean that our older theories are out of date, and we must start a new to construct a new theory for our times?

This point of view is based on a confusion. If some important facts change, does the theory change? A theory is not a set of facts, but connections from one set of facts to another set of facts. In a simplified version, a theory says: the strength of condition 1 leads to the strength of condition 2. If condition 1 changes from strong to weak, does that mean that the theory is wrong, and we need a new



theory? Not necessarily. We must see if condition 2 also changes from strong to weak; if it does, the theory still works, but is applied to a new factual situation.

Let us take an example. One hundred years ago the German sociologist Georg Simmel stated the theoretical principle, that conflict leads to solidarity. When a group is in conflict with an external group, there is an increase in internal solidarity. People feel more loyal; they have a stronger sense of membership; this also makes their leaders stronger and gives them more authority. Does this principle become outdated after the year 1989, or 1991, or after September 11, 2001? Clearly not. After the attacks of September 11, there has been a huge increase in national solidarity in the United States; suddenly many people display American flags on their houses and cars; the level of agreement on public policy has become very high; the popularity of President Bush rose from moderate (about 50% approval rating) to the highest ratings ever recorded (90%) (Gallops polls). This is not much different than what happened in the summer of 1914 in Europe, when after the assassination in Sarajevo the states of Austria, Russia, Germany, France, Italy and England began to threaten each other with war; these threats increased national solidarity in each place, and huge crowds in the streets in Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, Paris, and London demanded that their countries go to war (Scheff 1994). Thus it is clear that a sociological theory, the principle that external conflict strengthens internal solidarity, is correct through all the changes in the world from the year 1900 to the year 2001.

Let us return now to the main theme: whether the world has changed in recent years, so that the principles of International Relations must be changed. Sometimes it is true that a theory is so specific to the historical period in which it is formulated, that when conditions change the theory no longer tells us very much. For example: 60 years ago much importance was given to Balance of Power theory. This theory held that when several big states struggle for power, they make alliances so that they keep up a balance of power of roughly equal strength. The theory was based on the period of European history when England, on its island off from the Continent, looked upon European struggles and always chose

to fight on the side of the weaker coalition, so that no state could ever dominate the Continent. When France was strong, England allied with Germany; when Germany was strong, England allied with France. Balance of power is not a very general theory however; it doesn't explain why the balance of power disappeared after the end of the second World War; and it doesn't explain earlier state systems such as the Roman Empire, or the dynasties of Imperial China. In fact, balance of power theory doesn't even explain England's behavior; at the same time England was maintaining balance of power politics in Europe, it was expanding an overseas empire around the rest of the world.

There have been other more recent fashions in International Relations theory: for example the theory of neorealism; and on the other hand the theory of hegemonic stability. These theories clash on the question of whether the relations among states are a realm of anarchy, where each follows its own self interest and no laws or principles control them except their own force; or on the contrary that there is an international or interstate order, a framework in which the world carries on its business. In the latter theory, the strongest state or hegemony acts to enforce the rules of the international game, and thus provides stability – in this view it is functionally useful for the world to have a hegemonic power like Britain or the US to keep order. The point I would like to make is that both things are possible. Under some historical conditions, the world looks like a violent confrontation of self-interested states; at other times, there is more of an appearance of international rules of the game. But this is a continuum, not an all-or-nothing choice between extremes; states exist by controlling military force, but they also tend, to lesser or greater degree, to enter into alliances and coalitions, and to make arrangements even with their enemies. We have seen these throughout history: the Roman Empire was at first a system of alliances before it became an Empire; the Holy Roman Empire (or German Empire) of the European middle ages was chiefly just a diplomatic structure, a kind of early and limited version of the United Nations. Historically, the units do not stay static; sometimes states become bigger or smaller, more independent or more amalgamated, with many possible variations in be-

tween: the history of China, Hong Kong, and other parts of East Asia provide good examples. And new state forms emerge; sometimes alliances become stronger and turn into states, as we see happening perhaps today in the case of the European Union, and has happened 200 years ago in the federation which became the United States of America. Thus we can ask: what will be the historical result as today states enter into a new kind of alliance to combat terrorism? Will this eventually become a new kind of state, somewhere along the continuum from a weak decentralized alliance to a centralized structure? We need a theory which explains just how these different state configurations emerge under different historical conditions. Can we have a theory which cuts across history?

Another theory which is linked to a particular historical time and place is the theory of Chinese dynasties. This is the theory, held by Chinese historians for almost 2000 years, that China goes through a dynastic cycle: first there is a strong centralized state; the emperor or state leader has high prestige and legitimacy; then the state becomes corrupt, the officials become ineffective, tax collection weakens, bandits appear inside the borders and foreign enemies outside become more troublesome. Eventually the state falls into disintegration; but then one of these small states becomes stronger; it conquers and unifies the rest, and starts a new dynasty. In some respects this is a strong theory, at least for the period from the Han dynasty up through the Qing dynasty, and some think perhaps even later. However we may ask: does this theory apply only to China? Are there no general principles which apply equally to China and to other states? The Roman Empire, for example, expanded and then collapsed, but it never was reconstituted as a new empire; instead it broke into pieces that have never been reunited. In the Warring States period for about 500 years before the Han dynasty, there was no dynastic cycle but instead there were many states in north China which acted according to Balance of Power theory; whenever one of these states became strong enough to threaten to conquer all the others, a coalition formed against it which prevented its expansion. Accordingly we must ask, why should Chinese dynastic cycles begin at a particular time in history? And does the principle of a dynastic cycle come to an end,

once China becomes part of the larger global world of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?

I will return shortly to these questions about China. First let me introduce 2 theories which help explain all of these historical changes, including the situation of the world today. First is the geopolitical theory of the state; and the second is the theory of bureaucratization as basis for formal law. Both theories develop from classic analysis by Max Weber, but have been taken much further by recent historical sociologists.

## THE MILITARY-CENTERED GEOPOLITICAL THEORY OF STATE POWER

A geopolitical theory of the state has developed from the implications of Weber's point that the state is fundamentally an organization of military force which claims a monopoly over the legitimate use of force upon a territory. If such a theory is to be of use, it should be treated as a set of variables, not as a constant. How much monopoly over legitimate force a state has, and how much territory it applies to, is not a constant, but changes over time as the outcome of political and military struggle. The principles which determine these changes are principles of geopolitics.

What then are the key geopolitical [GP] processes? What makes a state geopolitically stronger in its control over a geographical territory, and what makes it weaker, introducing a degree of geopolitical strain? I will summarize in a series of *ceteris paribus* principles which bring out the causes of variations in the territorial power of states; since all causes may operate simultaneously, we must combine all these principles to explain changes in the power of states.

[1] **Resource advantage.** States which mobilize greater economic and population resources tend to expand at the expense of states mobilizing lesser such resources. Big states get bigger; and rich states get bigger, because they absorb smaller or poorer states on their borders – either by conquest and formal annexation, or by means of alliances, protectorates or empires absorbing their eco-

conomic resources and exercising command over their military forces.

**[2] Geopositional advantage.** States with potential enemies on fewer frontiers tend to expand at the expense of states with a larger number of frontiers to defend; this is sometimes referred to as the advantage of marchlands over centrally-located states. Conversely, states in the middle of a zone of multiple states tend to be caught in a web of multiple shifting alliances and to fragment over time.

The first two principles, resource advantage and marchland advantage/interior disadvantage, cumulate over time; relatively resource-rich or geographically better positioned states grow at the expense of poorer and interior states, thereby swallowing up their resources and controlling their territory. Over long periods of time (my estimate is several centuries), a few large states consolidate. This leads to periodic showdown wars (or so-called hegemonic wars; for example the Napoleons wars were a hegemonic war; World War II was another). Such showdown wars are highly destructive and are fought at a high degree of ferociousness, in contrast to wars fought in balance of power situations among many small contenders, where gentlemanly rules of limited combat tend to prevail. A showdown war may end either by total victory of one side, which establishes a 'universal' empire over the accessible 'world'; or to mutual exhaustion of resources by the contenders, opening them up to disintegration and incursion from new smaller contenders on the margins.

**[3] Principle of overextension or logistical overstretch.** The greater the distance from its home resource base a state extends its territorial control, the greater the logistical strain; overextension occurs at the point at which more resources are used up in transportation than can be applied in military force relative to the forces which enemies can muster at that location. Overextension not only causes military defeat and territorial loss, but is a major cause of state fiscal strain and state breakdown. The time-patterns of the growth of large states or empires, and their collapse, are quite different. Whereas the cumulative growth of resources and territorial expansion occurs gradually over a long period of time (on the order

of centuries), the collapse of empires tends to occur quite rapidly (in a few crisis years).

Overextension is especially dangerous for a state because it tends to set off revolutions. Overextension is especially dangerous for a state because it tends to set off revolutions. Not only does the state lose territory, but also its monopoly over force, and its ruling faction or party tends to lose legitimacy; and these are crucial conditions leading towards revolution. This follows from the state breakdown theory of revolutions: the model that revolutions are never successful merely because of dissatisfaction from below, but only where popular dissatisfaction is mobilized in a situation of crisis in the state apparatus of coercion; that in turn is typically due to military strains, either directly or in their effects upon state revenues, with the situation exacerbated by conflict between propertied and state elites over who is to pay for the shortfall (Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991; Collins 1995). The link to external geopolitical affairs is both direct and indirect: direct because military weakness reduces the legitimacy of whoever is in control, indirect because military expenses have historically been the bulk of state expenditure and accumulated debt.

Let us see now how GP principles apply to the Chinese dynastic cycle. First: the importance of the economic resource base. Because of the geographical configuration of East Asia, any state which unified the two great river valleys of the Yellow River and the Yangtse, would have population and economic wealth much greater than any other state in the region. Thus the central state was able to expand against enemies in almost all directions, which were certain to be smaller and poorer. Eventually the overextension principle comes in: successful Chinese armies extend to frontiers which are very far from the home base; this produces logistical strain, and the military budget becomes increasingly expensive, at just the time that armies become less effective. This is what causes rebellions against taxation, the rise of banditry, and the corruption of officials. When the crisis occurs, China finds itself in the center defending attacks from many different directions. Thus the middle splits up, and there occurs a period of fragmentation, the recurrent warring states periods which occur in the intervals between the

great dynasties. Eventually one of the smaller states located in a borderland or marchland region, begins to grow, until it attains cumulative advantage and reunifies the great population areas of the center. Now there is a strong dynasty, deriving strong legitimacy from its recent geopolitical success, and the dynastic cycle begins again.

The dynastic cycle follows from GP principles, but only as long as China was in a zone which was largely cut off from other parts of the world, especially by the inefficiency of transportation in early historical periods. Once China became part of the larger space of world power relations, the conditions for the dynastic cycle were no longer present. Thus the cycle operated in a particular period of history, although it was the result of causal principles which are universal.

Thus although GP principles are first formulated by being abstracted from particular historical periods, it has been possible to broaden the application of such principles by reformulating them on the basis of wide historical comparisons. Classic and modern efforts to formulate GP principles, which I have drawn upon in my summary, have been based upon studies of Greco-Roman antiquity as well as early modern through contemporary Europe (Andreski 1971; Gilpin 1981; Kennedy 1987; McNeill 1963, 1982 ranged even more widely in world history). My own initial inductive formulation (Collins 1978) was based upon analyzing historical atlases for the Middle East and Mediterranean regions from the first ancient empires through medieval and modern times, and for China since the earliest dynasties. In other words, GP principles (resource advantage, marchlands, overextension, etc.) hold across the range of patrimonial and bureaucratic state forms. In addition, I was able to use GP principles successfully in 1980 to predict the strains which brought about the collapse of the Soviet empire (a continuation of the older Russian empire). And finally, geopolitical principles fit into a coherent theory of the state, developed from scholars from Weber through Skocpol, Tilly and Mann, which as we will see, gives a well-supported picture of all major aspects of state growth, state crises, state organization, political mobilization and revolution.

**The Geopolitics of International Coalitions.** Do geopolitical principles still have validity or usefulness in analyzing the current world situation, after the attacks of September 11, 2001? Let us apply GP principles to the US 'war on terrorism'. From a GP viewpoint, the US war in Afghanistan has not been a repetition of the Vietnam war, nor a repetition of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. To apply GP principles, we must summarize the resources on each side, look at their geographical positions, and their problems of logistical extension or overextension. In the cases of the Vietnam war and the Soviet-Afghanistan war, there were 2 big world power blocs; so each side in these local wars had support from much bigger chains of resources. In both cases, these were guerrilla wars. The guerillas did not have to win the war by battlefield victories, but only to continue resistance until their opponents supply lines became too costly – in other words, to wait until logistical overextension made their opponent withdraw. In addition, in the case of the Soviet-Afghanistan war, the Soviets had multiple military commitments on other fronts – in Eastern Europe, Northeast Asia, the long-distance nuclear weapons race, etc. The Soviet weakness was precisely the reverse of the marchland advantage – the USSR was in the middle extending forces in all directions. It was Gorbachev's effort to reduce these multiple military commitments that led to the Soviet policy of giving up Eastern Europe, allowing the wave of anti-Communist revolts that eventually broke up the USSR.

In contrast with this, the war in Afghanistan in October-December 2001 was an alliance of all the big powers against the supporters of the terrorist movement al-Qaeda. From the first GP principle, resource advantage, we would expect the US anti-terrorist forces and allies to win. The second GP principle, geopolitical advantage or disadvantage, posed no problem for US forces insofar as it was not fighting multiple wars on widely separated fronts. The main GP danger was in the third principle, overextension: Afghanistan is very far from Western supply bases, and thus the war could become very costly, depending on how long it would continue. The main worry of US policy during the 1990s was to avoid logistical overextension – the so-called lesson of the



Vietnam war – not to become bogged down in long and expensive wars in distant places. Thus President George W. Bush, in the early period of his administration, tried to bring the US military into a completely defensive posture, and to withdraw from international commitments. This was changed, of course, by the attack of September 11 – according to the principle that external attack brings national solidarity, and widespread desire for national military action. The question became: how long would this national solidarity last, compared to how long it would take before the problem of logistical overextension set in?

By the end of November 2001, the danger of logistical overextension did not appear too serious. One reason is that the war was not a guerilla war, but a conventional war between Taliban troops defending fixed positions, especially around the cities, against the Northern Alliance troops supported by the US. This was exactly the situation in which US superiority in air power would be most effective. A second reason was that the Taliban was not organized, as a unified army but as a coalition of warlords and tribal clans, along with some ideologically-recruited troops. We should distinguish between the Taliban movement, which was concerned above all with enforcing its conservative Islamic religious policy, and the wider Taliban coalition. Hence it was very easy for the Taliban coalition of clans and warlords to unravel, once it became apparent the Taliban would lose any direct battles against superior US military resources. This is a typical case of what political sociologists call a bandwagon effect (Marwell and Oliver 1993).

Geopolitical principles thus have favored the US alliance in Afghanistan. GP principles still work, and we do not need a new kind of theory for this kind of war.

GP principles do not mean that states are always threatening to go to war. On the contrary, states often pursue diplomacy instead of fighting. But it is a mistake to regard GP and diplomacy as separate from each other. Diplomatic strength depends on GP strength; successful diplomacy takes account of GP principles rather than ignores them.

GP principles do not become superceded, even in a world rule of humanitarian law. It is important to emphasize that GP princi-

ples do not require the bounded independent state actor as the unit of analysis. Instead, GP analysis focuses upon the organization of force, and derives the territorial and organizational configurations into which this organization is shaped under different historical conditions. The formation of a new type of organization of force, at the level of international alliances or even world government, is compatible with these principles. GP principles were first developed by analyzing the relations of separate states, but they apply to any organization which attempts to exercise military force over a territory. It could be an international alliance, or a world government. Examples are the United Nations, which is as yet a rather weak world government, but one which nevertheless attempts to define as legitimate solely that force which it sanctions; or the European Union, which is a federation moving towards becoming a European government; it will become a so at the point at which it has an autonomous European army. There are many other kinds of international organizations and alliances, such as NATO in its recent phase of expansion, and ad hoc alliances such as the anti-terrorist alliance assembled by the US after September 11, 2001.

To the extent that the UN, EU, NATO or any other such international alliance become effective in enforcing a new world order, it is because they have GP advantages over their potential opponents. That is to say, they must be superior in resources and in organization to mobilize those resources. They are subject to geopolitical constraints, since it is easier to project force at some targets than others. It is easier to project Western forces in the Balkans than in Central Africa, which explains why there was an intervention to stop ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, but not in the genocide in Rwanda-Burundi. And international organizations will be in danger of logistical overextension, like all previous states. If there can be megastates and world governments, there is also the possibility of state breakdowns in these units. There is always the possibility that international organizations may undergo revolutionary breakdowns, driven by the classic pathway of GP strain, fiscal crisis, infra-elite struggles, and coinciding popular resentments from below. Even if there is a real world government or massive world federations in the future, they will be subject to the

restrictions of GP principles. The possibility that a world government might some day be established does not mean that it would necessarily be permanent; it could undergo a revolution, just like previous states.

Such a development remains in the hypothetical future. Thus far the transnational coalitions and their righteous crusades in favor of international law and justice look a great deal like previous alliances and federations. NATO's role in the Kosovo intervention of 1999, and the negotiations of recent years to expand NATO membership into the old Warsaw pact, can be interpreted as a project to keep the US involved in the center of European power, at a time when it has been implicitly in rivalry with the EU as alternative way of organizing military force upon the Continent. Such rival and overlapping coalitions have happened before; the geopolitics of medieval Europe was to a considerable extent a struggle between the opposing claims of Christendom unified under the papacy, as against the German (or Holy Roman) Empire; there were also some smaller confederations which batted upon the fall of the Empire to create federal states such as Switzerland and the Dutch Republic (Collins 1999). NATO in the 1990s looks a good deal like the German Empire of the late Middle Ages, in the sense that it was mobilized for wars against external enemies (in the case of NATO this was first the Soviet bloc, then rogue states; in the case of the medieval German Empire it was mainly the Ottoman threat); this collective enterprise was always led by the strongest state (in the modern case the US, in the medieval case the Habsburg ruler) which took military command and provided the bulk of the troops. Historically, alliances and federations have often exercised military force under strong control from its dominant member; in effect the entire alliance operates to enhance the power-prestige of its leader. In ancient Greece, the Athenian League against the Persians was also the Athenian empire coercing participation and punishing withdrawal. It is a plausible argument that whatever the surface emotions and humanitarian ideals involved, the various US-led coalitions of the post-1945 period are manifestations of the desire of US political leaders to keep up power-prestige in the international arena. Nor is the idealism of

today's transnational coalitions new; the crusades of medieval Christendom which bolstered the power of the Pope were equally idealistic, and in general every large military enterprise acts in an atmosphere of emotionally charged belief. The big test of a truly transnational political order would be if a major coalition were to go into military action against the desires of its strongest member: if the UN were to take action, for instance, against the USA.

As of today, the UN has a long way to go to become a state in the strong sense of the term. The UN assembles military forces by a feudal-like levee, in which each partner to the alliance raises and pays for its own troops and keeps them under chains of command which are largely separate, except for temporary international combinations of officers at the top. Under these conditions, the effect of warfare in galvanizing national identity is not transferred to the coalition, but reinforces the ethnonationalism of the states identified with each body of troops. A true UN army, and thus the basis of a strongly held world-identity, would depend upon the UN being able to recruit its own soldiers from throughout its member countries, combining them into formations irrespective of origin. The state penetration of the UN (not to mention other alliances) is shallow; it does not wield coercive power to discipline its own members, but thus far has intervened only in the internal affairs of non-members. In this respect these international coalitions have operated like empires of conquest expanding their spheres of control.

## **STATE BUREAUCRATIZATION AS BASIS FOR RULE OF LAW**

Now we come to the second sociological theory: bureaucratization and the rule of law. Let us return to the question: are we moving towards a new era of international rule of law to support universal human rights? My answer is yes – in some respects. But I want to emphasize that this idealized goal in the use of force is not so new, and that it happens in accord with existing sociological principles.

Law is a set of ideals and procedures; but law always has an organizational base. Laws do not enforce themselves. Thus it is naive, on the part of some observers of the September 11 attacks, to

say that Osama bin Laden and others are responsible, and should be brought to trial; but at the same time to say there should be no war against the Taliban coalition. The organizational base of law is the power of the state; and that in turn depends on geopolitical power, and on the extent and effectiveness of state organization.

In the modern ideal of the rule of law is that there should be general principles designating individual rights and responsibilities, and formal procedures for judging who has which rights, and who is responsible to be punished for violations. The organizational basis for this kind of law is the rise of the modern bureaucratic state. The rise of the modern state is a topic on which there has taken place in the last 25 years of scholarship a cumulative development of historical sociology. I will briefly summarize 3 points: the military revolution, state penetration into society, and the extension of bureaucracy.

The full-fledged ideal type of the force-monopolizing territorial state gradually developed since 1500 in the West, although there have been variations along this continuum elsewhere in world history. The story that we have become familiar with through the work of Michael Mann (1986, 1993), Tilly (1990), Parker (1988) and others begins with the military revolution which drastically increased the size and expense of armed forces. State organization began to grow in order to extract resources to support current military expenses and past debts, above all by creating a revenue-extraction apparatus. This was the pathway towards bureaucratization and centralization. State penetration into society brought a series of effects in economic, political and cultural spheres. State apparatus now could increasingly regulate the economy, provide infrastructure, compel education and inscribe the population as citizens in government records. These same processes mobilized people's collective identities into social movements operating at a national level: in part because the state itself now constituted a visible target for demands from below; in part because state penetration provided the mobilizing resources of communication, transportation, and consciousness-raising. State penetration thus fostered both its own support and its domestic opposition; as Mann has demonstrated, both nationalism and class conflict were mobilized

as part of the same process. The modern state became a breeding-grounds for social movements; and whenever a social movement has been successful, it has institutionalized its victories by creating new laws which are administered by the bureaucratic state.

The rise of the modern state leads directly to the theory of bureaucracy. In terms of organization, the rise of modernity is best characterized, not as a move from feudalism to capitalism, but from the patrimonial household to bureaucratic organization. What Weber called patrimonial organization exists where the basic unit of society is the household, and larger structures are built up as networks of links among households. It is important to note that the household mode of organization is not the same thing as the family mode of organization, although they are related. The household typically had at its core a family, the head of household with his wife (or wives) and children, perhaps with some other relatives; and thus property and authority were hereditary. But households could never be very large if the only people they included were family members. Patrimonial households were full of pseudo-familistic relationships; a household of the upper classes would include servants, retainers, guards, guests, hostages and others, all supported from the household economy, and all expected to provide some resource: work, loyalty, or military force. An important house contained within it enough armed force to be powerful; it was a fortified household. Links to other households of lesser or greater power constituted the political structure of the society; under certain legal arrangements, these might be called properly 'feudal', but a variety of other structures were possible. The economy too was organized in patrimonial households or their linkages; the labor force consisted of servants and apprentices under familistic protection and discipline rather than independent wage relationships. To refer to a great 'house' was both literal and metaphorical; the aristocracy and the great burghers or merchants were the possessors of the largest household units with the most retainers.

The rise of bureaucracy was the dismantling of the patrimonial household. Workplace was separated from home, private force was superseded by professional military and police units belonging to the state. The physical separation among buildings where produc-

tion, consumption, politics and administration took place was also the creation of the divide between public and private spheres. Bureaucracy was the creation of offices separate from the persons who held them, the creation of a sphere of interaction apart from family ties and pseudo-familistic relationships of loyalty and subordination. The impersonality of bureaucratic organization depends upon paperwork, codifying activities in written rules and keeping count of performance in files and records. Bureaucracy is thus the source of modern ideologies: the rule of law, fairness, justice, impartiality; the previous practices of loyalty to the patrimonial household, and the consumption of organizational property became condemned as nepotism and corruption. Bureaucracy is the source of individualism since the unit of accounting and responsibility is the individual who can be appointed, promoted, moved from one position to another, paid, reprimanded, and dismissed, all with reference only to their personal dossier rather than their family and household connections. The shift from patrimonial households to bureaucracy promoted the ideology of individual freedom, but also the ideology of alienation from the impersonal public order; both are sides of the same coin. The shift to bureaucracy also made possible modern mass politics: ideologically, it fostered the conception of the individual's rights to democratic representation and legal status apart from the jurisdiction of the household head; structurally, it made it possible for workers, women, and youth to mobilize in their own places of assembly and their own cultural and political movements. One reason class conflict became possible in the modern era was because penetration by the revenue-extracting state created a centralized arena for political action; a complementary reason was that class and other conflicts were mobilized by being freed from the constraints of patrimonial household organization (Tilly 1978, 1995; Mann 1993).

The great historical transformation was the shift from patrimonialism to bureaucracy. These Weberian concepts are of course ideal types, and actual historical configurations were often mixtures. Weber used a concept of 'patrimonial bureaucracy' for intermediate forms, typically a more centralized governmental structure than feudalism or local chiefdoms ('caudillismo' in Latin Amer-

ica). Egypt, late Imperial Rome, many Chinese dynasties, and early modern Europe all had particular mixtures of these ideal types, which slid up and down the continuum of patrimonial and bureaucratic forms.

What caused the transition from patrimonial to bureaucratic organization? Weber's answer has usually been interpreted as a series of material preconditions (existence of writing, long-distance transportation, a monetary system, etc.) or as a functionalist argument that bureaucracy arises because it is the most efficient way to coordinate large-scale and complex activities. For the grand historical transition we are concerned with, there is a more directly political answer. Recall that we are considering the state processually, as a struggle to monopolize legitimate force upon a territory. The state is a project, an attempt to control and coordinate force in as definite a manner as possible; under particular historical conditions, what is possible along that line may be quite limited. How then do organizations move along that continuum towards increasing monopolistic control? Weber sees the shift from kinship alliance politics towards patrimonial household domination as one move towards centralization and monopolization; the shift to the bureaucratic state is a much stronger move higher up the continuum. What enabled some states to make that move earlier or to a greater degree than others?

Bureaucratization was a move in the struggle between whoever was the paramount lord at any particular moment and his allies and rivals among the other great patrimonial households. A crucial condition was the geopolitical configuration. Decentralized chiefdoms and hereditary feudal lineages raised less military resources for their paramount lords and thus tended to be conquered, or were forced to imitate the bureaucratizing manners of the more successful states. Dynastic states proved geopolitically weak because far-flung marriage ties produced scattered states, in effect subject to the effects of logistical overextension. History of course is more complicated than a simple winnowing out of nonbureaucratic states by bureaucratic ones; resource advantage is not the only GP principle, and some states favored by marchland positions might survive with more quasi-patrimonial structures (as Britain did down



through the 19<sup>th</sup> century); and bureaucratizing states might nevertheless fail to expand their territorial power because of logistical overextension. Nevertheless, the long-run trend is towards the victory of the bureaucratizers. The successive waves of the military revolution were steps in the development of bureaucracy, first within the military itself (especially logistically-intensive branches such as artillery), then in the revenue-extraction service. State penetration was largely bureaucratization at the expense of the patrimonial household. Extensive market capitalism and especially its industrial form prospered under particular versions of state penetration and military mobilization; in this way bureaucracy spread from government into the economic sector; and this in turn fed back into still further government bureaucracy.

I have sketched a theoretical perspective of causality from the outside in: the various ramifications of the military revolution and the revenue-extracting state. In important ways, geopolitical processes are prime movers, even as they play into a multicausal situation. Not to say that states cannot take alternative pathways, but they do so at a risk: if they are too weak geopolitically vis-a-vis their neighbours, they become swallowed up into an expanding state which has successfully negotiated the military revolution and thereby have state-penetrating structures imposed upon them.

Bureaucratization underlies both the positive and negative features of modern societies. In contemporary discourse, the term bureaucracy is a negative one: it implies inefficiency, paperwork, impersonality, and endless complexity. In some parts of the world, the term bureaucracy also has the connotation of corruption, a regime of bribery; but this is not a sociological use of the term; it would be more accurate to describe corruption as a form of patrimonial organization – the rule of personal connections – which reemerges inside the framework of bureaucracy. The cure for bureaucratic corruption is more rule of law, which is to say bureaucratic administration in the strict sense of the term. Structurally, bureaucracy is the basis of the rule of law; and hence the question of a new world order is a question of the future of bureaucracy.

**Social Conditions for Expansion of World Law.** The transition now being proposed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to a

world rule of law and universal human rights, is an extension of bureaucratic organization and its ideological ethos. The rule of law and the focus upon individual rights are central to the way bureaucratic organization functions. What may be afoot now is not a transition beyond bureaucracy but an expansion of legalistic bureaucratic organization from the national to a global scale. To put this more precisely, there have long been in existence networks organized on bureaucratic principles which have overlapped the boundaries of national states; what is happening today is that the sheer quantity of such transnational organizations has increased, and they have moved more intensively into attempting to regulate human behavior everywhere in the world according to an explicit formal code. We are seeing efforts which are analogous to the state penetration which took place earlier at the national level, both in conjunction with fledgling international government, and in international business, charitable, and social movement organizations whose networks overlap even wider than today's international alliances. What determines whether this movement to spread universal law will succeed?

The rule of law developed first inside those states which became bureaucratic and penetrated deeply into their own societies, so that every individual became subject to the law. For there to be a world law of human rights, there must be an organization which carries out an analogous penetration into every society around the world. This could be some kind of international organization or coalition. But – and this is my main point – its degree of success depends on its geopolitical strength. And that is to say that the expansion of universal rights and protection of those rights must go through a phase where the organizations upholding world law are geopolitically stronger than those who oppose it. This extension could be diplomatic, but it is bound to be at least partly military. International organizations will sometimes have to fight and win to establish world law. This may be accompanied by some peaceful extension, if the power-prestige of the international coalition grows stronger, attracting other societies who want to join, in another bandwagon effect.

The ideal of world law is where individuals are held responsible

for crimes against human rights. But in order to get to that point, world bureaucratic organization has to penetrate all societies; and the struggle against this penetration is carried on by groups, not individuals. Struggles are bound to produce group animosities – following the principle that external attack increases group solidarity – so there are always processes like Islamic groups supporting al-Qaeda because it is perceived as a form of loyalty to embattled Islam. And when conflicts are violent, there are always individual members of groups who are caught in conflicts for which they as individuals are not responsible. This is particularly true in war, where some civilians and noncombattants always get killed – since warfare is a very crude and dangerous instrument. But there seems to be no escape from this on the pathway to world law. On the opposing side, the crimes against humanity which some people are attempting to control – genocide, murderous ethnic cleansing, terrorist attacks – are by their very nature attacks on groups, not on individuals, and largely on civilian populations. It is only at the end of this process – in a territory where the rule of law prevails, and there is an organization to enforce it, which people consider legitimate – that law can successfully treat conflicts as crimes for which individuals are to be held responsible.

Finally, let us ask: where does the opposition to universal human rights come from? Much international ideological conflict of the last 10 years has pitted those regions with bureaucratic ideals against parts of the world which are still relatively more patrimonial. Interventions against ethnic cleansing and genocide are attempts to impose the universalism of bureaucratic regions upon the patrimonial ethics of non-cosmopolitan, relatively closed communities whose structure fosters ethnic particularism and reinforces the bloody ritualism of group vendetta. Conflicts over the rights of women in the Islamic world also have this character: the bureaucratic part of the world pitted against patrimonial households that Islamic conservatives struggle to preserve. The conflict over international terrorism is a struggle between these two organizational forms. We see this organizational conflict in Afghanistan. ‘Taliban’ means students of a madrasa teacher, which is to say a traditional Islamic school in which the teacher acts like head of household for his students; and they are bound to him throughout their

lives by ties of patrimonial and religious obligation. The Taliban was thus based on explicitly patrimonial organization, although it had to take on some bureaucratic elements as it attempts to administer the state. Fundamentalist or conservative Islam is a form of religious organization which is both patrimonial in its own church structure, and which sees itself in a violent struggle to maintain itself against the threat of the outside world based on bureaucratic organizational principles.

Over the long run of history, modern bureaucratic organization has everywhere prevailed over the patrimonial household. Much of international terrorism today is an attempt to defend the patrimonial structures remaining in parts of the world, against the structures and ideologies of bureaucratic organization. If world law and rights for individuals are based on bureaucratic organization, it is realistic to expect that the organizational procedures claiming to protect human rights will increase during future history. This will not be a smooth and continuous trend, since the international organizations for administering and enforcing rights are part of the struggle for geopolitical power, and are subject to geopolitical tensions and possibilities for breakdown. Human rights will become an increasingly widespread ideological theme, but their realization will depend on the contingencies of organized state power. And that has always been a process of ongoing tensions and conflict.

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## Is a Theory of Caste still Possible?

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### **ABSTRACT\***

A theory of caste must offer a way of ordering the facts in such a way that it does not diminish the significance of some or ignore others. It must also be comparative. Caste organization is found in some parts of South Asia but not all. Equally, structural parallels may be found in many other parts of the world and one should not therefore assume that the defining characteristics of caste are unique to Hindu communities or to the ideology of Brahmanism. What is needed is a theory which explains why all of the traits associated with caste are found together where and when they are, whether in South Asia or elsewhere.

Various theories of caste are reviewed in this chapter before coming to the conclusion that one of these makes much more sense of the historical and ethnographic evidence than the others. Most theories depict castes as arranged in a ladder-like vertical order. Sociologists have tended to emphasise this 'stratification', regarding the ideological and ritual manifestations of caste, such as the pervasive concern with purity and impurity, as epiphenomenal. Anthropologists have generally avoided this error but have faced other intractable problems. Some see caste as a recent colonial ar-

tifact, others as an ancient indigenous category. Many are heavily influenced by the ideological reductionism of Dumont's theory of Hindu society. On the other hand, Dumont's analysis raises so many problems that some have attempted to retreat from theory and restrict their studies to ethnographic description.

The argument here is that caste results from an uneasy stalemate between the pull of localised lineage organization and the forces of political, ritual and economic centralization encapsulated in monarchical institutions. Caste systems are the product of a certain degree of centralization which involves the organization of ritual and other services around the king and dominant lineages. The central institution is (as Hocart suggested) the kingship. The removal of Hindu kings in India with the advent of colonialism does not negate this thesis, for it is a specifically western view of kingship which allows for only one monarch within a territory. Kingship (and the configurations of castes associated with it) was always reproduced at the courts of lesser chiefs, and is still replicated today in the households of members of dominant castes.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a considerable gulf between the ways in which sociologists and anthropologists typically look at caste.<sup>1</sup> Sociologists tend to regard caste, in a regrettably truncated fashion, as an extreme form of social stratification which is a kind of sociological opposite of class: 'Open and closed stratification systems are sometimes described by the terms *class* and *caste*' (Chinoy 1967: 178).<sup>2</sup> Frequently equated with Hindu social organization through the misleading epithet 'the Indian caste system', sociologists usually home in on the fact that where there is caste, 'an individual's social position is fixed at birth and cannot be changed' (Giddens 1989: 735). When sociologists use the concept to refer to situations outside of India, this is normally where racial segregation occurs, as in the southern states of the USA following the abolition of slavery or the more contemporary situation in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> What is common to both cases, it is argued, is the cultural insis-

tence on maintaining the 'purity' of certain groups by establishing inviolable boundaries, particularly with reference to intermarriage.

Such a perspective is, however, of limited value. In the first place, the kind of ethnic separation referred to above normally concerns a very small number of groups, usually two or three, whose opposition to each other is crude and straightforward. In a typical caste system, however, it is not unusual for a score or more castes to be bound together in very complex relationships.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the kind of ethnic cleansing which we associate with former Yugoslavia is undoubtedly also motivated by a concern for 'purity', as is the Mediterranean 'honour and shame' complex, but we would never think of describing either as a caste system.

To characterise caste systems baldly as forms of stratification is also to leave out most of what is really intriguing about them. In particular it tells us nothing about the seemingly endless flow of ritual and ritual prohibitions which preoccupy all members of caste-organized communities in their everyday activities, for example those revolving around the preparation and consumption of food. Nor does it account for the existence of untouchability, an institution which causes many egalitarian Westerners, and increasingly Indians themselves, to condemn caste out of hand as a barbarous institution which has no place in the modern world.

A further difficulty with the stratification approach is the implication that all castes are arranged, one above the other, in a relatively unambiguous way like a football league table. This is often coupled with a somewhat distorted view of the two Indian concepts most closely associated with the word 'caste', namely *varṇa* and *jāti*.

The *varṇa* consist of four categories, each ranked differently in terms of social honour. Below these four groupings are the 'untouchables', those in the lowest position of all. The *jāti* are locally defined groups within which the caste ranks are organized... Those in the highest *varṇa*, the Brahmins, represent the most elevated condition of purity, the untouchables the lowest. (Giddens 1989: 213).

This simple description, while accurately reflecting the most



common conceptions of caste both among Hindus and among those who comment on them, contains a number of misrepresentations. In the first place, the concept of *varṇa* refers to four basic social *functions* (usually defined as priesthood, kingship, generating wealth, and providing service) and not to kinds of social groupings. *Jātis*, which are groups based on kinship and marriage, are not subsets of *varṇas*, any more than English people with the surname 'Smith' are a subset of people who work as smiths.

Secondly, it is problematic to say that Brāhmaṇs are the highest *varṇa* for a number of reasons. There are thousands of Brāhmaṇ castes (*jātis*) whose members continually dispute each others' status. If some of them enjoy greater prestige than others, as they themselves always state, the criterion for this must be something other than assimilation to the Brāhmaṇ *varṇa*. Another difficulty is that those Brāhmaṇs who are priests are often seen as subordinate to those whose rituals they perform and whose status they thereby legitimate: paradigmatically, the kings and landowning nobility who are identified with the *kṣatriya varṇa*. Priests are often portrayed as vessels or scapegoats who, through ritual, take away the sin, evil and death of their patrons. Parry's work on the Maḥābrāhmaṇs of Benares (especially 1980, 1986) provides one of the best examples of this and is supported by the work of Raheja (1988a) and Levy (1990) among others.<sup>5</sup> In any case, only a minority of Brāhmaṇs actually work as priests so it is not self-evident that the status of all Brāhmaṇs is determined by this particular function, as is often claimed.

The implication that there is an automatic correspondence between *varṇa* and *jāti* is also unwarranted because there is often a certain amount of dispute about which *varṇa* a particular *jāti* should be identified with. Parry's representation of the caste hierarchy in Kangra in north-west India is a particularly good illustration of this. Here, he says, a number of castes whose *varṇa* is perceived by others as *śūdra* see themselves as either *kṣatriya* or *brāhmaṇ* (Parry 1979: 110, Table 14). Such discrepancies between self-representation and representation by others are a common feature of caste-organized communities.

In short, then, the conventional portrayal of caste, as one might find it in a standard textbook of sociology, or, one should add, as one might find it in the accounts of many Hindus themselves, is riddled with problems. Anthropological theories of caste have also run into a number of difficulties. There is widespread agreement that the most important theoretical statement on the subject in recent times has been Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980) and a glance at any bibliography on caste will immediately reveal that the influence of this book has been unparalleled. Yet Dumont's theory has been the focus of sustained criticism for more than a quarter century, to the point where it is no longer clear how much, if any, of it remains tenable.

Some anthropologists have tried to sideline the theoretical problems by sticking to what they can actually observe on the ground during prolonged periods of fieldwork, as if ethnographic description and theoretical abstraction belong to mutually exclusive zones. At an international workshop on 'Caste Today' held in London in 1993, for example, the implications of recent ethnographic and historical research for the theory of caste were markedly absent from virtually all of the workshop's deliberations.<sup>6</sup>

Where theory did appear, as in the question of the relation between caste and colonialism, the central issue was not confronted. Some claimed, following the deconstructionist fashion, that caste was a relatively recent colonial artefact deriving from the classificatory obsessions of census-makers. Others argued, or implied, that caste is an ancient Hindu principle enshrined in classical Hindu texts. It cannot, of course, be both. In other publications, three of the contributors to *Caste Today* have starkly illustrated the differences of opinion about this crucial fact regarding the explanation of caste:

Caste has existed for thousands of years: Sanskrit literature provides us with irrefutable proof of this.

(Deliège 1993: 9; my translation from the French).

Despite the many changes which historians are now beginning to bring to light, a certain correspondence prevailed for nearly two thou-

sand years between the actual division of society into castes and sub-castes and what people considered to be right, proper and desirable from the social point of view... In the traditional order, caste was an integral part not only of Hindu law but also of Hindu religion. (Béteille 1992: 16).

It is increasingly clear that colonialism in India produced new forms of society that have been taken to be traditional, and that caste itself as we now know it is not a residual survival of India but a specifically colonial form of civil society. (Dirks 1992: 59).

Whichever of these views happens to be true, it should be obvious that it is impossible to divorce sociological theory from ethnography and history: even to introduce the word 'caste' is to imply a particular way of cutting up the world which relies on certain theoretical presuppositions. More obviously still, if anthropologists working in different regions are to compare their findings, there is no option but to turn to theory. As in the study of any social institution, to be comparative is to be theoretical and to be theoretical is to be comparative.

Why should there be such difficulty in providing a theoretical explanation of caste when an enormous amount of ethnographic and historical evidence on the subject has been produced over the last forty years or so? There are, I believe, a number of interrelated reasons for this which can be summarised as follows:

1. Most theories of caste appear to involve an unjustifiably arbitrary selection of evidence.<sup>7</sup> Since it appears to many that it is the facts themselves which are inconsistent, a common approach has been to ignore those elements which are awkward and to present the allegedly overwhelming picture suggested by those facts which are retained. The objection to this is that the awkward facts still remain, even if they are hidden.

2. While Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* has been criticised endlessly, many continue to argue, or imply, that his basic premises are undeniable (see, eg., Deliége 1993). Given the difficulty of constructing an alternative theory using the same premises, or of finding alternative premises from which to begin, the majority of

recent commentators on caste have preferred to concentrate on particularistic historical or ethnographic studies. However, this retreat from theory has not been any less problematic since, whatever is presented, some selection or prioritising of material is inevitable: it is impossible to write about caste without betraying an endorsement of one theoretical position or other.

3. The claim is often made that caste is unique to either India or Hinduism, thus making comparison with other social forms elsewhere difficult, if not altogether undesirable.

4. Caste is seen by some as being quintessentially a traditional village phenomenon while others see it as a colonial invention which exists more in the minds and classificatory needs of imperialist foreigners than it does as an ethnographic or historical reality. Apart from being mutually contradictory, both of these perspectives are too limited in their purview to provide an adequate explanation of the range of phenomena which are associated with caste.

The remainder of this article will explore these problems. I will argue that a consistent theory of caste is not as elusive as it has often been made to appear, and that the difficulty is not with the facts, but in finding a way of ordering them which does not diminish the significance of some or ignore others.

## **DISCARDED THEORIES OF CASTE**

Before coming to Dumont's theory of caste, which deserves special consideration, let me briefly mention four other approaches to the subject which should be rejected. In fact all of them have been dismissed many times before but they have an insidious way of resurfacing and two of them are still in popular circulation. (By 'popular' I mean both in the minds of many who practise caste and in the minds of many of those who study them).

The first theory which we can dispense with is that caste is a product of race, although an important qualification must be added before we throw out the idea altogether. The connection between

caste and race was made by some of the earliest outside commentators on India who related it to the Aryan invasion of India and to the fact that members of Brāhmaṇ castes were often light-skinned while members of peasant and low castes were often dark-skinned or displayed other 'aboriginal' traits.<sup>8</sup> There is some basis in reality for this observation, but it is of limited value for an explanation of caste. Over the centuries certain populations were undoubtedly subjugated by others and the historical remnants of this can still be seen clearly in many places. But for the most part there is no obvious connection between caste and racial characteristics and in any case, the complexity of caste systems cannot be explained by a marker as crude as race. The often made comparison with racial segregation does not explain why one should need such a plethora of castes in any locality.

The second theory, though false, is still widely believed. This is the idea that there is an inherent connection between caste and occupation which explains how caste systems work in general.<sup>9</sup> There are two reasons why this connection is not a sufficiently good guide. The first is that it is never the case that *all* members of a given caste perform a particular occupation. A very common situation is that a particular caste is associated with a particular occupation: for example, being a priest or barber or potter, but that many (perhaps even all) members of the caste are agricultural labourers, or work in nearby towns as clerks or rickshaw drivers or whatever, or are employed by the military in some more or less distant garrison.

So while a couple may be referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Potter (i.e., they are designated as members of the local Potter caste), they may in fact have never made a pot in their lives. This will not deter others from saying about them: 'Our sons cannot marry their daughters because they are Potters and we are Tailors [for example]' even though the Tailors in question have never sewn cloth but are in fact minor civil servants in a local government office, or members of a musical band performing Hindi film music at weddings and other social occasions. And, by extension, the same

statement will be made by members of other castes. The general principle, then, is that a Mr. Potter need not be a potter, a Mr. Brāhmaṇ need not be a priest, and so on.

The second reason why the correspondence between caste and occupation is a poor guide to the working of caste is that many people who perform the same occupation belong to quite distinct castes. This is particularly obvious with relation to two classes of work: agricultural labour and priesthood. Given that the vast majority of the population of the Indian subcontinent work on the land but are divided into thousands of castes, it is obvious that this occupation does not, by itself, provide an indicator of caste membership. It is also evident that many groups perform priestly activities but see themselves as completely separate from each other and different in caste status. (For examples at either end of the Indian sub-continent, see Levy 1990 and Fuller 1984). In fact it is quite common for some priestly groups to regard others performing ritual activities as kinds of Untouchables.

A third theory which runs into difficulties is favoured by some comparative sociologists. This revolves around the idea that caste is fundamentally about dominance and exploitation and any talk of pollution concepts as the criterion for distinguishing between castes is mere ideological obfuscation. On this argument, Brāhmaṇs are at the top and Untouchables are at the bottom not because of their respective degrees of purity, but because of their respective degrees of material or economic power. The work of Gerald Berreman is one of the best examples of this kind of argument though there is a similar, if more subtle, version in the writings of the Indian sociologist André Béteille.<sup>10</sup> The reason that this explanation does not hold is simply that economic power and ritual status do not always coincide. There are Brāhmaṇ castes whose members are very poor and there are castes which are seen as low or even Untouchable whose members are in fact quite wealthy in comparison with the rest of the population.<sup>11</sup> There also frequently appears to be some kind of in-built mechanism which inhibits any easy conversion of acquired wealth into higher caste status. Against this it must be said that conquering groups always enter a

local caste system with *kṣatriya*, or kingly, status even if they were previously regarded as 'barbarians' or outside the pale of the local caste system altogether.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the idea that there is a straightforward correspondence between caste status and economic position is that if this were so, it is doubtful if we would notice anything distinctive about caste systems or have any reason for using the word 'caste' in the first place.

A fourth theory which has little to recommend it is the kind of argument advanced by E. R. Leach (1960) in an essay entitled: '*What do we mean by caste?*' Leach argued that in caste systems every group has its place, and the element of competition among them had been largely removed, resulting in harmonious, integrated systems. While caste systems *are* often well integrated, this does not mean that competition for status is lacking.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, the institution of hypergamy in north India, which is widespread among landowning castes, is nothing other than a competitive marriage strategy where the goal is to improve one's status at the expense of others. Other examples of refusing to accept one's place include the construction of false genealogies (Shah and Shroff 1958), name changing in order to make it appear that one 'really' belongs to a higher caste (Rosser 1966), moving to another locality in order to assume a new identity (Caplan 1975), and conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and Buddhism (Isaacs 1964, Juergensmeyer 1982). In short, the idea that castes always meekly accept their status position is unfounded.

## WHAT REMAINS OF DUMONT'S THEORY OF CASTE?

Another argument against seeing caste as a form of social stratification is that this perspective smuggles in a modern, individualistic, 'Western' set of values which is inappropriate where traditional, 'holistic' values prevail.<sup>13</sup> This is one element of Dumont's position which seeks to restore the indigenous values of caste to their rightful place. Dumont claims that two oppositions form the ideological basis of caste. The first of these is between purity and

impurity which, he argues, is manifested most clearly in the location of Brāhmaṇs and Untouchables respectively at opposite poles of the caste system. The second opposition is between (ritual) status and (secular) power and this shows itself, he states, most clearly in the respective positions of the *brāhmaṇ* and *kṣatriya varṇas* in the ancient Vedic texts, or in the respective positions of priest and king (or priestly caste and dominant caste) on the ground. There is, says Dumont, an ideological disjunction such that power is subordinated to status, the king to the priest, because it is through religious values that the whole system gains its meaning, and the Brāhmaṇ priest is the repository of these values.

At first sight this way of looking at things seems appealing because it appears to account for the endlessly repeated alleged 'fact' that Brāhmaṇs are the highest caste. However, on closer inspection the concept of Brāhmaṇs being supreme because of their superior priestly purity (Dumont 1980: 56) is difficult to sustain. As I have already mentioned, there is a widely held belief that priesthood is a defiling activity, the idea being that through rituals which are performed for a patron the officiant takes away the patron's impurities leaving the patron pure, at least momentarily. Some have argued that it is really *inauspiciousness* which is being absorbed by the priest rather than *impurity* and that one ought to draw a distinction between these two concepts (Raheja 1988a). I will not pursue this argument here though the concept of inauspiciousness is indeed more apposite in explaining how caste relations are structured. The reasons for this will become clearer in the discussion of Hocart's theory of caste below.

The fact that there are many different kinds of priest, not all of whom are Brāhmaṇ by caste, presents another problem. Men of Barber caste, for example, often perform ritual activities for lower castes which are strictly analogous to those performed by Brāhmaṇs for higher castes (Parry 1979: 59). And, as Raheja (1988a: 20) has pointed out, affines are sometimes called to perform priestly duties where a Brāhmaṇ, or a priest from another caste, cannot be found.



Most intriguingly, there is a category of Brāhmaṇs, in north India referred to as Mahābrāhmaṇs (literally 'great' Brāhmaṇs), whose function is to perform funerary rituals. This is a particularly despised group because they are seen as being permanently defiled by the death pollution they take on themselves (Parry 1980: 94). The problem for a theory of caste which would have Brāhmaṇs at one pole and Untouchables at the other is that the Mahābrāhmaṇs are seen as both at the same time! Their ethnographers tend to dispel the ambiguity by arbitrarily assigning them either very high or very low status but this really amounts to a sleight of hand (see Quigley 1993: 81). Moreover, the same apparent paradox applies in a much more understated way to the members of *all* those castes, whether Brāhmaṇ or other, who work as priests. It is no coincidence that Brāhmaṇs who follow some profession other than priesthood widely regard themselves as superior in caste status to Brāhmaṇs who function as priests (see, e.g., Fuller 1984: 59). Dumont's opposition between pure and impure, which he equates with the opposition between Brāhmaṇ and Untouchable, is, then, suspect though there is no denying that Hindus are constantly pre-occupied by pollution concerns and this must be explained.

What of Dumont's other opposition, between status and power, or between priest and king? The main difficulty with this concept is that it only works at the level of ideology, and then only if one is extremely selective and listens to certain voices and not others (see also Burghart 1978). Dumont's thesis depends primarily on the idea that 'power in India became secular at a very early date' (Dumont 1980: 76) but this is simply not sustained by the evidence, whether from texts or from ethnography. Kings always retained a central position in the rituals they patronized and their functions were replicated on a lesser scale by the well-to-do members of dominant castes, a situation which has not changed with the collapse of Hindu kingship in the face of colonialism. The argument has been put succinctly by Raheja:<sup>14</sup>

Kingship no longer exists, but it has been, perhaps, replaced by the ritual centrality of the dominant caste as it has been described in the

Pahansu [village of her fieldwork] ethnography. There, as in many of the textual traditions on kingship, the Brahman is hierarchically superior, yet the dominant landholding caste stands at the center of a complex ritual organization that permeates nearly every aspect of the everyday life of the village (Raheja 1988b: 517).

Dumont is well aware that his theory does not apply to the observable facts on the ground: 'In theory, power is ultimately subordinate to priesthood, whereas in fact priesthood submits to power' (Dumont 1980: 71-72). But the solution to this apparent contradiction, he insists, is to understand caste as a structure of ideas, not as something which can be grasped by looking at particular territories (Dumont 1980: 154). The difficulty with this argument is that Dumont is simultaneously asking us to consider an actual place (India) which exists in space and time: we are asked to be empirical when it suits his theory and something less than empirical when the facts appear to contradict it.

In spite of these difficulties, there is a legacy from Dumont's theory which students of caste ignore at their peril, and some recent alternative interpretations of caste such as those of Klass (1980), Hall (1985), and Baechler (1988) are seriously flawed in this regard. Among the most important of Dumont's ideas are the following:

- The 'holism' of caste systems is in direct contrast to the individualism which is the dominant ideology of the modern West.
- One cannot talk about castes in isolation, only in relation to other castes. This means that one must have some kind of theory of a system of relations. Also, since this system is repeatedly found in a very large number of localities, there must be an underlying structure which gives rise to this.
- The relation between priest and king (or priests and dominant castes) is central.
- The connection between priesthood and inauspiciousness is also central.
- Given the endogamous character of castes, the role of kinship and marriage obviously requires careful attention.

## THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF CASTE ORGANIZATION

Perhaps the most widespread idea of all about caste is that it is exclusive to Hinduism and this is why it is found only in India or in places where Hindus have migrated. This idea is impossible to counter if, following Weber (1958: 29–30), caste is defined in terms of one's position relative to Brāhmaṇs. But virtually all of the institutions which one associates with caste are found in different degrees in other societies at different periods of history. The most obvious of these are:

- recruitment to one's social position at birth;
- kinship organization in terms of lineages;
- differentiation between noble (or kingly) lineages and others;
- endogamy such that marriage tends to be within a restricted group of lineages;
- pervasiveness of ritual as a mechanism for structuring social relations;
- pollution concepts which place an ideological stress on the purity of women, or of lineages, or of kings, or of priests;
- monarchical institutions, whether material (palace complexes, monuments to kings and royal deities), social (courtly lineages and royal retainers), or ideological (royal rituals, chronicles);
- untouchability and scapegoatism.

To explain caste is to explain why and when all of these traits are found together when only some of them are found elsewhere. To begin with the premise that all of the defining characteristics of caste are unique to India or to Hinduism, as has been far too uncritically accepted from at least Weber on, is to be much too selective in deciding what it is that defines caste and to deny the possibility of any kind of fruitful *positive* comparison with other places and other eras.

Even if one were to avoid groups which have converted from Hinduism for political reasons, one could still find South Asians who practise caste but profess a different religious identity – Muslims in Pakistan (Barth 1960) or Buddhists in Nepal (Gellner 1992) for example. One must also recognise that there are Hindus

who argue that caste is not part of their religion. And there are Hindus who *claim* to have nothing to do with caste but who clearly maintain its existence – for instance, by refusing to eat or intermarry with people they deem beneath them.

Béteille (1991, 1992) has argued that the Indian urban middle classes are moving away from caste and that 'family' is becoming the more important institution. Apart from the fact that he presents virtually no evidence for this claim, it is clear that there are still limits to who is regarded as an acceptable marriage partner. By and large Béteille seems to be referring to the intermarriage of members of Brāhmaṇ and dominant castes which formerly would have been separated territorially and politically but now find themselves thrown together in all of the institutions of a modern state. While the barriers to intermarriage may be coming down among these groups, this does not mean that they will marry into other castes which they continue to regard as inferior. In any case, to say that 'family' is now becoming more important is not of itself to indicate any sea change since family pedigree is precisely what caste has always been about. As Hocart put it: 'Castes are merely families to whom various offices in the ritual are assigned by heredity' (Hocart 1950: 20). I will return to this idea below.

It is obvious that caste continues to play a significant role in the contemporary political arena, but among educated people this is widely seen as shameful and completely inappropriate in a modern, democratic state. Béteille argues that '[it] may safely be assumed that in India today, everyone is prepared to speak publicly in support of equality, but none in support of hierarchy or inequality' (Béteille 1991: 3). This conclusion flies in the face of a huge body of recent ethnographic material. While it is undoubtedly correct to point out that there is an increasing *distaste* for the values of caste among the educated middle class, the institution itself does not appear to be in decline. In the last two decades alone, scores of ethnographies from all over South Asia have made clear that caste continues to be the bedrock of social organization for hundreds of millions of people. While there is perhaps increasing

ambiguity surrounding the ideology of caste, it would appear that inequality, far from being regarded as invidious, continues to be seen pervasively as normal, inevitable, even 'natural'.

This is not to deny that there have been significant changes in the ways in which caste manifests itself during the past century. For example, where caste blocs appear today, uniting previously disparate groups, this is a modern development which would have been inconceivable in the not very distant past. A good illustration of this is found in the mass conversions to Buddhism stimulated by Gandhi's contemporary and rival Ambedkhar.<sup>15</sup> Himself an Untouchable, Ambedkhar sought to raise the status of other out-castes by breaking their attachment to Hinduism. But this could never have been achieved without the apparatus of modern communication, transport networks, and education, the bases of which were laid down during the period of colonial rule. And it could not have happened if the British had not decapitated the myriad local systems of political allegiances which underpinned pre-colonial caste systems by establishing new foci of political legitimacy and identity. Given the opportunities to organize collectively, Untouchables and others did so with a vengeance. It is not that they lacked the will to improve their position under the old *régime*; more often than not, political and economic structures deprived them of the means, primarily literacy and mobility.<sup>16</sup>

This does not, however, mean that caste is paradigmatically a product of the traditional Indian village. One of the most entrenched fallacies in the literature on caste, this notion stems from a distorted colonial view of India as a land of village republics and from the fact that most detailed ethnographic work on caste has been done on village communities which are of manageable size for a field researcher working alone.<sup>17</sup>

The mistake has been fuelled by a frequent failure to consider the historical and ideological relationship between village and town, the former being, literally, a reflection of the latter. In an article which draws attention to this mirroring quality, Pocock argues that both in theory and in fact the traditional Indian city

stands for completeness. It is a microcosm of the cosmos and provides the most complete expression of moral values and social order because it is the locus of maximum caste activity. It is also the place where the king is to be found, the main function of the king being 'the maintenance of caste order' (Pocock 1960: 66). Rowe echoes this when he writes that:

The distinguishing mark of a town or city in the ancient texts... was that *only* there did one find all the castes resident... The founder of a village or petty kingdom of several villages... fulfilled the same role but on a minor scale. And the village socio-economic system... reflected the arrangements of the city on a lesser scale. (Rowe 1973: 213).

Perhaps the best extant examples of this connection between caste and preindustrial urbanism are to be found in the social organization of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, the seat of a complex, urban civilization for more than a millennium. One reason for this is that the 'Valley', in reality a circular bowl surrounded by Himalayan foothills, is extremely fertile and while the majority of the population have traditionally been agriculturalists, the area has always been capable of supporting a large population many of whom could be engaged in occupations other than producing food. As a gateway between India and Tibet, the strategic location of the Kathmandu Valley also made it an important trading centre. Over the centuries, the combined wealth of commerce and agriculture was converted into impressive temple, palace, and domestic architecture as well as being channelled into the competitive patronage of ritual which required a plethora of religious specialists.

Moreover, unlike India, Nepal was never colonized by either the Muslims or the British. In the small city-kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, caste has flourished for centuries among both Hindus and (Mahāyāna) Buddhists, with Hinduism, as Gellner (1992: 55) observes, being the religion of the rulers.

While there is not space in this short article to give even a potted description of the complex history and sociology of the Kath-

mandu Valley, one can point to some of the main features which underpin its caste organization.<sup>18</sup> These same features are at the basis of caste everywhere, even if not always in such a clear, or complete, form.

Any description of caste organization must rest on two preliminary observations. The first is that to be a member of a caste, one must first be a member of a lineage for it is groups of lineages which we recognize as castes by their agreement or refusal to intermarry, interdine, or perform certain rituals together.<sup>19</sup> The second observation is that caste systems are only possible given a certain measure of territorial centralization in regions which are capable of sustaining a complex form of social organization – river basins and other fertile areas are typical. One does not normally find caste systems in deserts or high mountains and it is no accident that in Nepal, for example, caste organization typically evaporates at approximately 4,000–6,000 feet above sea level where the land becomes progressively infertile and populations begin to depend on pastoralism to augment their meagre agricultural resources.

Caste, I would argue, results from a kind of uneasy stalemate. On the one hand, there is the pull of the lineage, institutionalised in the various ways in which lineage members exert control over one another – by restricting marriage choices, in the observance of periods of mourning when fellow lineage members die, by taking part in each other's life-cycle rituals (marriage, caste initiation, and so on), and through periodic collective worship of lineage deities. On the other hand, there are the forces of economic, political, and ritual centralization, encapsulated in monarchical institutions. Among these, the most striking are the often spectacular palace-temple complexes and rituals such as *Dasaī* which are traditionally linked to royal power and which provide a means by which lineage and caste divisions can be transcended as communities come together in common devotion and celebration.<sup>20</sup>

If lineage principles were so strong as to inhibit any kind of developed centralization (as in the paradigmatic forms of segmentary

organization), then clearly caste could not take root since it depends on a complex division of labour which must be based on something other than kinship. If, on the contrary, centralization were to be so effective that recruitment for the performance of various social functions was always based on principles other than kinship, then obviously caste could not flourish either. The weakening of caste among urban professionals in modern India reported by B  teille, though exaggerated, certainly indicates this.

I have already pointed out some of the dangers in representing the order of castes in any local caste system as an unambiguous perpendicular ladder with Br  hman  s at the top and Untouchables at the bottom. Many of the difficulties in constructing an adequate theory of caste seem to me to be the result of being imprisoned by this ladder-like representation which one is led to almost inescapably if one starts with the notion that every caste can be said to be 'higher' or 'lower' than every other caste. An alternative representation which does not give rise to this problem focuses rather on the fact that caste systems are relatively centralized forms of political organization: Figure 1 gives a simplified model of this.<sup>21</sup>

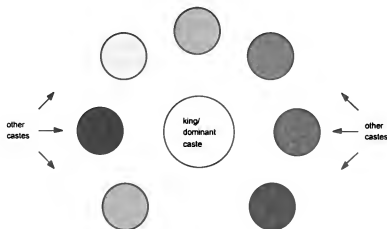


Figure 1. The general structure of caste systems



This model is of course grossly simplified, and particularly in two respects. Firstly, it is not only dominant caste households which are able to attach other castes to themselves. To a greater or lesser extent, households in every caste will attempt to replicate this pattern by using their resources to employ members of other castes (or sometimes other, usually affinally related, lineages within the same caste) to perform various services for them. Obviously, the greater one's resources, the greater will be one's capacity to do this. But virtually no household is so poor that it cannot at least occasionally afford to retain others to perform specialised ritual functions – at funerals, weddings, or caste initiation ceremonies for example.

Secondly, the model might give the impression that each caste is an undifferentiated bloc when the reality is more complex. Different lineages and different households within each lineage may vary substantially in their wealth and this may have important ramifications in terms of internal status differentiations within the caste. For example, the formation of *de facto* sub-castes is not uncommon when certain lineages attempt to set up more or less exclusive marriage circles within the caste and begin to call themselves by a particular name which sets them apart from their erstwhile caste fellows.<sup>22</sup> Over time these groups may become recognised by some as separate castes even though their *de jure* claims to such status may be seen as rather shadowy by others.

A number of other qualifications should be borne in mind when looking at the simplified model depicted in Figure 1. For example, castes vary enormously in size. Typically, the largest castes are the dominant landholding groups and those who provide the bulk of the agricultural labour while other castes which provide specialist services are frequently very small. While the members of most castes, because of their attachment to the land, will see themselves as belonging to one caste system only, others, particularly merchants, may well function in more than one community and may thereby attain a certain degree of autonomy from dominant land-owning castes.

It would be impossible to present on a single, flat page a model which showed either the ideological or physical distance of different castes from the centre. Some castes, or some lineages within certain castes, will legitimately claim to be nearer to the (royal) centre either in terms of their kinship pedigree (perhaps some among them have married into noble lineages), or in terms of the privileges they enjoy. The castes which supply the king's priests will undoubtedly claim higher status than the castes which supply the farmers' priests. Untouchables are frequently represented as being outside the community altogether and in fact must often live physically apart from other castes. This is because their primary function is to act as scapegoats and to take out pollution (i.e. whatever threatens social order) to beyond the community's limits. Finally, it is also possible that there will be others somewhere in the vicinity (renouncers, independent sects, members of other ethnic groups) who cannot be accommodated easily within the local caste system.

In spite of these qualifications, the underlying structure of caste organization is as Hocart (1950) portrayed it. The central institution for comparative purposes, he claimed, is kingship (and its associated ritual). For Hocart, castes are essentially 'families' which perform hereditary functions in order to ensure that the king and nobles remain free from pollution (1950: 17, 20). Whereas Dumont claims that the ideological pivot of caste is the priest's purity, Hocart argues that it is the purity of the king and nobles. There is another, more subtle, but very significant, difference between the two views which explains Hocart's reasoning.

In Dumont's view, the priest is highest because he *is* pure. Yet even if we were to restrict this claim to the realm of ideology, Hindu views concerning the purity of priests are extremely ambivalent. As one eminent Sanskritist has concluded, if a Brāhman does not wish to compromise his purity, the one thing he must *not* do is function as a priest (Heesterman 1985: 38). For Hocart, however, it is not that the king and nobles *are* pure but that they *should be* pure because they provide a model for others. From this per-

spective, the priest is an instrument or vessel who facilitates the king's kingship or the noble's nobility: caste organization, which requires some members of all non-noble lineages to provide ritual services, is a continual striving to make this possible.

Where Dumont argues that the underlying structure of caste is in the ideology, in fact the ideological representations made by Hindus are irretrievably contradictory. The common structure underlying caste systems is rather to be found in constraints given by kinship on the one hand and kingship on the other, both of which are set against a particular material backdrop which allows a territorially limited kind of centralization to develop.

It is not only the historical experience of Nepal which belies the claim of a growing number of scholars that caste emerged out of the colonial experience of India.<sup>23</sup> The removal of Hindu kings in India heralded the superimposition of new forms of political authority and new forms of political association. But the traditional institutions of kingship, on which caste organization depends, have proved much more resilient and remain, as they have been for centuries, encapsulated in the political and ritual centrality of dominant lanowning castes. Here it is partly the Western conception of kingship which is at fault for it tends to characterise kingdoms as having a single monarch. The traditional Hindu view has always been much more elastic, allowing for 'little kings' and 'great kings' as reflected in such epithets as *mahārājadhirāj*, 'great king of kings', which is still today the title of the king of Nepal.

No-one has done more to elucidate the concept of 'little kings' than Dirks in his historical study of the former princely state of Pudukkottai in the Tamil-speaking region of southern India. He argues convincingly that 'until the emergence of British colonial rule in southern India the crown was not so hollow as it has generally been made out to be. Kings were not inferior to Brahmins; the political domain was not encompassed by a religious domain' (Dirks 1987: 4). Unfortunately Dirks confuses representations of caste in the colonial and postcolonial periods, particularly those of

Weber and Dumont, with caste as it actually was under British rule and has been since Independence. Paraphrasing Dirks, one might say that even at the end of the twentieth century, kingship in India is not as hollow as it is generally made out to be.

## NOTES

\* This article is a slightly amended and updated version of a paper that first appeared as a chapter in Searle-Chatterjee, M. and Sharma U. (eds.) (1994) *Contextualising Caste: Post Dumontian Approaches*, Sociological review Monograph Series (pp. 25–48). Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>1</sup> Many sociology textbooks treat caste in a surprisingly cursory way given that it is an institution which continues to affect the lives of a huge swathe of the world's population. Hamilton and Hirszowicz (1987: 90–99) provide a very readable introduction to some of the central debates. Possibly the best short introduction to the subject is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry by Marriott and Inden (1985). Deliège (1993), which is very heavily influenced by the work of Dumont, also offers a good review of the issues.

<sup>2</sup> See also Berger and Berger (1972: 144) and Davis (1948: 377–378).

<sup>3</sup> See Dumont (1980: 214–215, 247–266) for references on this and his argument that caste and racism should be carefully distinguished.

<sup>4</sup> Among the Newars of Nepal, where I did my own fieldwork, there were traditionally said to be sixty-four castes.

<sup>5</sup> The implications of priests being scapegoats are discussed in Quigley (1993: ch. 4). For a more comparative perspective on the scapegoat phenomenon in relation to caste, see Quigley (2000). Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1995 [1972]) offers a fascinating theory connecting scapegoating to the foundations of culture in a manner which has clear resonances with Hocart's theory of caste discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> The papers presented at the workshop, held at The School of Oriental and African Studies, London on 12–13 July 1993 were later published as (Fuller 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Klass (1980) provides a review of some of the main theories.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Risley (1891, 1908) and the critiques of Ghurye (1932), Dumont (1980: 349–350, fn. 15c), Pinney (1989), Inden (1990: 77), and Dirks (1992).

<sup>9</sup> An interesting report on the politicization of 'backward castes' by Rettie (1994) is fairly typical of the misleading popular connection made between caste and occupation.

<sup>10</sup> Berreman (1979), Bêteille (1965). See also Meillasoux (1973), Menscher (1974), and the article by Rosser (1966) which I have looked at elsewhere: Quigley (1986), (1996) and (1995a).

<sup>11</sup> An example of the latter from my own fieldwork would be the Nāy caste of Kathmandu, many of whom are butchers who have become very wealthy in recent years due to the rising demand for meat among the growing, and increasingly affluent, population.

<sup>12</sup> Levy's *Mesocosm* (1990) is a good example of a highly integrated, though extremely complex, caste system in an urban environment.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Macfarlane (1992/93) presents a useful summary of Dumont's ideas on individualism and points to a basic contradiction. While Dumont asserts that individualism is a concomitant of the modern rise to primacy of the economic sphere, he also wants to claim an ancient pedigree for the roots of individualism which he finds in early Christianity.

<sup>14</sup> Raheja (1988b) provides a breathless review of the literature on this subject most of which I agree with. Where I would disagree is in her assertion (which seems to derive from Marriott's (e.g. 1968) transactionalism) that social life in India, as elsewhere, 'is semiotically constructed' (Raheja 1988b: 519). This leads her to adopt an approach which depends much too heavily on the differences in what people say in different contexts at the expense of emphasising the underlying structure of inter-caste relations.

<sup>15</sup> Deliège (1999 [1995]) offers an excellent review of literature on Untouchables although it tends to over-stress the contemporary economic and political situation of Untouchables at the expense of explaining the archaic social institution of untouchability and the mechanisms required to deal with it. Juergensmeyer (1982) provides a very readable account of the movement against untouchability in the Punjab which includes a chapter on Ambedkar's influence.

<sup>16</sup> In India, movements which took off from about 1910 included the All India Depressed Classes Association, the All India Depressed Classes Federation, the Adi Dravida movement in the south which proclaimed that the Untouchables were the original inhabitants of India, and movements like Ad Dharm and Adi Hindu in the north which worked on variations of this theme. The Untouchables were not, of course, the only ones to realise their political clout and the Congress Party, as the main nationalist grouping, was very keen to make sure that Untouchables did not hive off and form a separate, powerful constituency.

<sup>17</sup> See Dumont (1966) on the genesis of the idea of the Indian 'village community' and Fuller (1977: 111) for an argument that 'the archetypal 'traditional' village, with its *jajmani* system and local political structure centred on the dominant caste, is not traditional at all, but was, as Cohn (1970: 45) suggests, mainly a creation of the British Raj'.

<sup>18</sup> Since the mid-1950s, a huge amount of research has been carried out by anthropologists, historians, geographers, and others in the Kathmandu Valley. Among the works which are particularly relevant to the present discussion are: Fürer-Haimendorf (1956), Toffin (1984), Gutschow and Michaels (eds.) (1987), Levy (1990), and Gellner and Quigley (eds.) (1995).

<sup>19</sup> Kolenda (1978) is particularly clear on the lineage basis of caste.

<sup>20</sup> Discussions of the centrality of Hindu kingship and royal rituals include Dirks (1987), Raheja (1988b), Galey (1989), Yalman (1989), Fuller (1992, ch. 5), Quigley (1993, ch. 6), and Toffin (1993). I am particularly sorry that I did not come across Yalman's short but powerful article before writing *The Interpretation of Caste*. In a rather critical review of my book which makes a bewildering number of misrepresentations, Good claims, among other things, that much of my argument about caste is inapplicable to South India and Sri Lanka (Good 1993). Yet my position is very similar to that of Yalman who writes: 'If we can demonstrate that there is a caste system in Sri Lanka, that the king who controls the caste system is merged into the gods, that the palace is a temple and that this connection between royalty and divinity is not primarily Buddhist, but also obtains for the kings and temples of South India, then it is clear that Dumont's theory will have to be seriously re-examined' (Yalman 1989: 143).

<sup>21</sup> I have given a number of alternative representations of this model, illustrating how a caste system appears to different castes, in Quigley (1993: 153–156).

<sup>22</sup> For examples of internal differentiation within the Rājputs of northern India and the Śreṣṭhas of Nepal, see Parry (1979) and Quigley (1995a, 1996) respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Dirks, for example, writes that 'colonialism in India produced new forms of civil society which have been represented as traditional forms; chief among these is caste itself' (Dirks 1989: 43). See also Cohn (1970: 45), Fuller (1977: 107–112), Dirks (1992: 61), and Inden (1986, 1990: 49–84). Both Dirks and Inden are heavily influenced by Said (1978). Dirks's description of caste as a 'trope' inspired by the classificatory needs of colonialists (Dirks 1992: 56, 76) greatly trivialises its sociological significance.

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## **How Chase-Dunn and Hall Got it Almost Right**

**Review of Christopher Chase-Dunn  
and Thomas D. Hall,  
*Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems\****

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At the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association in Toronto in 1997, Christopher Chase-Dunn was an invited critic in a session on Andre Gunder Frank's forthcoming book *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998), which argues the case for the dominance of Asia in the world-economy between AD 1400 and 1800. Chase-Dunn entitled his talk, 'How Gunder Frank Got it Almost Right'. A similar title seems eminently appropriate for a commentary on Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall's recent book *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (1997). Thus the title 'How Chase Dunn and Hall Got it Almost Right'. This title is a high compliment on their work, for in the social sciences no one gets it completely right, and few get it even half right. Most get it wrong (often completely wrong).

I read the very first draft of this book in manuscript in 1989. At that time Chase-Dunn was the sole author and he had written a very short manuscript of about 175 pages. I reviewed the book for a publisher, recommended publication, and thought the book would appear sometime in 1990, or by early 1991 at the latest. It didn't. Chase-Dunn had bigger aspirations for the book and asked Hall,

with whom he was already working on related projects, to join him as coauthor. At the time I thought that was a very good move, and indeed it turned out to be exactly that. Chase-Dunn and Hall have worked extremely hard on this book over the intervening period, and they have produced a manuscript that is vastly superior to the one I read in 1989. The result is an excellent book that makes a number of important contributions to the study of social evolution.

One of these contributions is a real theory of long-term change. In 1992, at a session at the annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeology, I was an invited critic in a session in which Chase-Dunn and Hall overviewed their work and claimed that it gave us a theory of social transformation. I protested that they didn't really have a theory of change, but rather just a static comparison of types of world-systems. This is a problem that often appears in evolutionary theories, and Chase-Dunn and Hall are, like me, evolutionary in their thinking. I am happy to report that ever since I made this criticism the authors have been busy responding to it. They have been able to produce a genuine theory of change that can be compared to and contrasted with other such real theories.

The authors take as their point of departure the world-system theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, a theory that has had an extraordinary influence since its inception in 1974. They are among a growing legion of scholars who have tried to modify Wallersteinian world-system theory in order to make it suitable for the analysis of world-systems prior to the sixteenth century. Chase-Dunn and Hall propose that the world-system is the basic unit of analysis, not just since the sixteenth century, but for several millennia prior to it as well. In this regard they develop a very useful and informative typology of world-systems, in which they identify kin-based and tributary world-systems along with the modern capitalist world-system. In turn, tributary world-systems are divided into four different subtypes. They also make a very important contribution with their notion of a hierarchy of levels of inter-societal interaction: bulk goods networks, political-military net-

works, prestige good networks and information networks. Also particularly impressive is Chase-Dunn and Hall's effort to trace out some of the most important features, from the point of view of their world-system framework, of the time period between 500 BC and AD 1400. The authors have learned a tremendous amount of history in writing this book. Their command of history is not only impressive; for sociologists, most of whom think history started in 1970, it is stupendous.

I would happily discuss these matters if I had more space, but, alas, space is short. Let me then without further ado turn to that issue in Chase-Dunn and Hall's work that I find the most interesting and important, and on which I feel most competent to comment. This is their causal theory of long-term social evolution. The authors develop their model at least to some extent in opposition to the general theory of social evolution that I presented in my book *Social Transformations*, which was published in 1995. The authors claim that I have not one theory, but three, one for each of the social transformations I seek to explain. There is no need to argue with this – they are right. On parsimony they have me beat. However, I will claim that my arguments, though less parsimonious, are more empirically accurate. The first great transformation I seek to explain is the Neolithic Revolution, which marked the transition, beginning about 10,000 years ago, from hunting and gathering to agriculture. I explain this transformation by relying on the population pressure model of Mark Cohen. The second great transformation is the emergence of civilization and the state, which began about 5,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Here I rely on Robert Carneiro's theory, which stresses population pressure, warfare, and what Carneiro calls environmental circumscription. However, I try to give a bit of a Marxist twist to the theory by looking also at relations of economic production, something Carneiro ignores. The final transformation I seek to account for is the rise of modern capitalism in Europe and Japan beginning in approximately the sixteenth century. Here I point to several basic similarities between Europe and Japan – their small size; their northerly

geographical location; their island nature, which led them to emphasize maritime trade over land-based trade; and their feudal politico-economic systems, which allowed for freer towns and greater latitude given to mercantile economic activity. These were preconditions that put Europe and Japan ahead of the rest of the world, but critical to this whole transformation was a long-term buildup of capital accumulation or commercialization, a process that had been occurring on a world scale for over four millennia. By sometime around AD 1500, or perhaps in the period between 1000 and 1500, the level of world commercialization had reached a critical mass that prompted a capitalist takeoff in those parts of the world most hospitable to capitalism.

So, I do have three theories, although all three are derived from the same general theoretical model. Chase-Dunn and Hall, by contrast, have but a single theory, which they use to explain the second and third transformations that interested me, although, of course, they see these transformations in world-system terms. Their model is a demographic and ecological one that is, as they note, derived from the work of the anthropologists Marvin Harris, Robert Carneiro and Mark Cohen. In Chase-Dunn and Hall's formulation, this model holds basically something like the following: population growth leads to environmental degradation, which then leads to population pressure, which then leads to emigration, which leads to circumscription, which in turn leads to conflict, hierarchy formation, and intensification. In this model, emigration, conflict, and intensification all work to reduce population pressure. To make this model a little tighter and make some of the relationships a little more logical, I would reformulate it as follows (and I don't think this violates Chase-Dunn and Hall's basic argument): population growth and consequent population pressure lead to environmental degradation. This then leads either to emigration, or, if that path is blocked by circumscription, to social conflict, hierarchy formation, and intensification. The authors call their version an iteration model, because the process cycles back on itself again and again to continue to produce evolutionary changes.



Now this model will do a fairly good job of explaining the first transformation the authors look at – the transition to state-based world-systems – but it will not work for the capitalist transition. Not only will it not explain that transition, but it will not, despite what is claimed by the authors, account for the continued evolution and expansion of the capitalist world-system over the past 500 years. In fact, even Chase-Dunn and Hall themselves, in a later discussion of the rise of capitalism in Europe, partially abandon the model in favor of another emphasis. They tell us that

the key to the emerging ... predominance of capitalism was ... the context of feudalism – a very decentralized, weak tributary mode of accumulation – embedded in the market forces of the Afroeurasian [prestige goods network] that allowed capitalism to displace the tributary mode of accumulation.

They go on to say that it was the continuance of strong bureaucratic states in Asia that prevented capitalism from first emerging there. I quite agree, and say precisely the same kind of thing in the formulation of my theory, but where in their abstract model is this kind of notion? I cannot find it there.

The authors do go on, however, to use their iteration model to understand the continued evolution of the capitalist world-system once it emerged. They say that

both environmental and social circumscription are even more important contextual stimulants to transformation in the modern system than they have been in earlier regional systems. Furthermore, though some tributary states (such as Rome) needed to expand in order to survive, capitalism intensifies this systemic feature to a new level. The realization problem is the need to expand markets in order to realize the profits of more and more commodity production. Capitalism handles this by geographical expansion.

But this is not circumscription as intended by Carneiro. Indeed, it is something else entirely, and exactly the kind of thing I emphasize as the engine of the evolution of the modern world-system – ceaseless capital accumulation.

In short, the modern capitalist world is driven by the desire of capitalists to accumulate capital, and population pressure and ecological degradation have little to do with it. In fact, from a capitalist point of view population growth is actually desirable because it

increases the number of consumers of commodities. Once we are within a capitalist system, the rules of the game change, and Chase-Dunn and Hall's model does not allow for this. More than one theory is needed. If I could have made do with one just one theory I would have, because no one is more committed to parsimonious explanation than I am. But empirical accuracy cannot be sacrificed for the sake of parsimony.

However, the last word has hardly been spoken on world-systems and the evolution of human social life. The important thing is that, despite my disagreement with some of their formulations, Chase-Dunn and Hall's recent book is an extremely important contribution to both the world-systems literature and the literature on social evolution.

\* An earlier version of this paper was presented as a talk in an author-critics session at the annual meetings of the Social Science History Association Meetings, Washington, DC, October 17, 1997.

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